

William Livingston

S O C I N I A N I S M

BROUGHT TO THE TEST:

O R

J E S U S C H R I S T P R O V E D

T O B E E I T H E R T H E

A D O R A B L E G O D,

O R A

N O T O R I O U S I M P O S T O R.

[Price One Shilling and Six-pence.]

20 C 1 M 1 A N 1 S M

BROUGHT TO THE TEST

OR

JESUS CHRIST PROVED

TO BE THE

ADORABLE GOD

OR A

NOTORIOUS IMPOSTOR

Dr. ON SHU, 1861

(3)

S O C I N I A N I S M
BROUGHT TO THE TEST:

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TO BE EITHER THE

A D O R A B L E G O D,

O R A

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I N A

S E R I E S O F L E T T E R S

T O T H E

R E V E R E N D D O C T O R P R I E S T L E Y.

I N W H I C H I T A P P E A R S,

That if J E S U S C H R I S T is not a Divine Person, the Mo-
hammedan is, in all Respects, preferable to the Christian
Religion, and the Koran a better Book than the Bible.

If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow
him. 1 Kings xviii. 21.

"Nay, really, as far as I have looked into the Mohammedan reli-
"gion, I must needs own, that it is a scheme more safe than the
"Christian, if Christ is not God. That person never called him-
"self more than a great prophet. He takes no titles in common
"with the supreme Being; and therefore his followers are under
"no temptation to believe him a God, because he never called
"himself so; but with us there are many passages that must be a
"snare to us, if they do not reveal Christ to be the great object of
"our faith."

Bradbury's Mystery of Godliness, Vol. 1. pages 410, 411. Edit. 1726.

By J O H N M A C G O W A N,
Author of DEATH, a VISION, and Familiar Epistles to
the Reverend Doctor PRIESTLEY, &c.

L O N D O N:

Printed for G. KEITH, in Talbot Court, Grace-Church-
street; J. JOHNSON, at No. 72, in St. Paul's Church
Yard; A. BELL, in Aldgate; and J. MATTHEWS,
in the Strand. 1773.

S O C I A L I S M

BROUGHT TO THE TEST.

OR

JESUS CHRIST PROVED

TO BE EITHER THE

ADORABLE GOD,

OR A

NOTORIOUS IMPOSTOR.

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO THE

REVEREND DOCTOR PRIESTLEY.

IN WHICH IT APPEARS,

That if Jesus Christ is not a Divine Person, the Mohammedan is, in all respects, preferable to the Christian Religion, and the Koran a better book than the Bible.

If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

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Birchbury's Mystery of Godliness, Vol. 1, page 410. Edin. 1740.

By JOHN MACGOWAN,

Author of *Deity, a Vision*, and *Familiar Epistles to the Reverend Doctor Priestley, &c.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for G. KILN, in Talbot Court, Grace-Church-Street; J. JOHNSON, at No. 73, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; A. BELL, in Aldgate; and J. MATTHEWS, in the Strand. 1773.

TO THE
REV. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S.

L E T T E R X.

REVEREND SIR,

MANY months are now elapsed, since I did myself the honour, of transmitting to you nine familiar Epistles, written according to the humour *, which happened then to be regent in my fancy. But alas, had I been as impatient for your answer, as Mr. Enfield is said to have been, on a similar occasion, I might by this time, through a tedious disappointment, have been reduced to a state of, either death or insanity. But although I have had the mortification to receive no answer, I cannot prevail with myself to decline the pleasure of writing to you again, how much soever you may be ashamed of your connections with such an absurd writer. Especially as you persist in your resolution to vilify the person of my only LORD and Saviour; to divest him of his Godhead, without which nothing can render him amiable and lovely in the eye of an awakened sinner. Besides, I consider myself as bound to a

* *Humour which then happened to be regent, &c.* In the letters referred, the Author was of opinion, that the weakness, absurdity and contradiction, joined with a spirit of ostentation, obvious in Dr. Priestley's religious pamphlets, were more proper subjects of ridicule, than of serious disquisition: He therefore refers here to the manner, or form, not to the matter or substance of those letters.

further correspondence with you, from a passage near the end of my fifth letter in the former Packet, intimating my resolution to address you again, whenever you should see meet again openly to write against the doctrine of CHRIST'S DIVINITY. You have now, Sir, furnished the occasion, and *virtually* called upon me to resume my pen, according to promise, by the publication of your "*Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity;*" and your "*Familiar illustration of certain passages of scripture.*" When the above pamphlets first came abroad, I paid little regard to them, seeing they were anonymous; but they being now ascertained, the productions of your intrepid pen, I have thought proper to peruse them with attention, and to animadvert upon them after my own manner; a manner with which, by this time, you are in some measure acquainted.

I do not mean to give you a regular answer, to the pamphlets in question; no, Sir, I leave regular answers to regular, thinking people, who can have patience and leisure to follow you from page to page, and from line to line; I shall at present satisfy myself with attending to one single article, "*THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST,*" concerning which, we differ as widely as possible.

In perusing your penny Appeal, I was amazingly struck, with the force and propriety of the concluding paragraph, in article FIFTH, which militates against the divinity of IMMANUEL; and which I think proper here to transcribe; notwithstanding it will give you some reason to conclude, that I begin at the wrong end of my work, which you know some people can do and make nothing of it. "*The great Creed of the Mahometans say you is, that there is One God, and Mahomet is his Prophet.*" Now that Mahomet is not the prophet

phet of God, it is to be hoped, they may, in time, be made to believe; but we must not expect, that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God."

Being engaged in the same great work of Reformation with yourself, and wishing to see true and undefiled Religion diffusing itself from sea to sea, from the river even to the ends of the earth; I have thought of a coalition of the Mohammedan and Christian Religions, as the most feasible scheme. Therefore I altered the Mohammedan Creed, and read it thus. "There is but **ONE** God, and Jesus is his Prophet." This, Sir, is admirably adapted to the rational scheme, and may well be called the Socinian's Creed; between which, and that of the Mohammedans, there is but barely the difference of one syllable, and that too not very material, on your supposition, that both Jesus and Mohammed are but men like ourselves. You know, Sir, it is a matter of vastly momentous controversy, which of two persons, by nature on an exact level with each other, and with ourselves also, shall be by us, exalted to pre-eminence, according as they shall severally appear to be entitled, by their Doctrines, and their Labours, to promote the good of mankind. The question then will be, Whether the Mohammedans shall receive the prophet Jesus, who is but a man like themselves; or Rational Christians shall receive the prophet Mohammed, who is also a man like themselves, and as they allow, a man of the first attainments? The solution of this important Question shall be the subject matter of the following Epistles, which I hope will furnish you with two or three hours precious entertainment.

But before I proceed to this solution, you will please to give me leave to lay a suitable foundation,

tion, for the coalition of parties, which I have proposed between Mohammedans and rational Christians; by pointing out their essential agreement, respecting the person and offices of JESUS CHRIST. For if we can but find, that there is no essential difference between the Mohammedans and rational Christians, respecting his person; names, circumstances, and such lesser matters, may the sooner be got over. So that if we succeed, the eastern world may either become rational Christians, or what you call the rational part of the western world may become Mohammedans. Which of the two shall be the event, is not very material: the difference appearing, either very trivial, or the advantage greatly on the side of the Arabic prophet, as perhaps the sequel may discover.

In your conversion of the Mohammedans, to rational Christianity, it will not be necessary that they should give up their faith in the Unity of God; their faith in this article, being identically the same with your own, as will appear on the comparison. Were we even to attempt their conversion to *real* Christianity, they needed not to part with their belief of the UNITY of the divine Essence, only to adopt the TRINITY, into their faith in the Unity of God; as the opposite of Unity in this sense, was never received by real Christians in any age, not even by the Athanasians themselves. No, Sir, it is only a slander raised against them, by Gentlemen of learning, of natural virtue, and of rational religion; who, to serve a turn, will not scruple to bely, even their most conscientious neighbours. Witness the reverend Dr. Priestley's writings; especially his *Essay on Church Discipline*.*

To prove my assertion, that Mohammed's faith, and that of Dr. Priestley, are identically the same, respecting

respecting the unity of God, permit me, Sir, to quote your own words, a little descant upon them, and then quote the words of the great *Prophet of Arabia*. You say *, “ How is it possible that three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all divine perfections, so as to be *true, very, and eternal God*, and yet that there should be but *one God*? A truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it, *or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our Creed, as utterly irreconcilable with the more favourite doctrine of the Trinity*. A term not to be found in Scripture. Things above our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be true; but things expressly contrary to our reason, as that *three should be one, and one three*, can never appear to us to be so.”

That the term TRINITY is not literally to be found in Scripture is allowed; but the same may be said of the characters, “ Rational Christians,” or “ Rational Dissenters;” also of that favourite phrase of yours, “ JESUS CHRIST is only a man like ourselves;” and many other phrases, which pass current enough with you, as well as with your neighbours. However, Sir, although it must be granted, the term TRINITY is not in the Bible, it must at the same time be owned, that the thing intended by it, is found therein, whilst that passage so adverse to yours, and the Mohammedan scheme, stands so firm, after all the laudable efforts of rational religion have, in vain, been exerted for its eradication. I mean — “ There are THREE that bear record in Heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST, and these THREE are ONE †.

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* Appeal, pag. 16, 17. † 1 John v. 7.

That this is above reason, to me does not very clearly appear; and that it is contrary to reason, as you are pleased to assert, is an affront offered to the soundest maxims of philosophy. That it is not above reason to allow, that three different principles may be requisite to constitute One *intelligent Agent*, I hope Dr. Priestley himself is a living witness. You will permit me to observe, that, notwithstanding your vast capacity, you are an animal, formed of the earth like other creatures. The word *animal* you know is compound, and supposeth two principles, existing in the subject to which it is applied. For instance, a creature is a creature, whether it be dead or alive; but it is not an animal unless it be alive. Here is therefore one principle, acting upon another, to compose an animal Being; a principle which quickeneth, and a principle quickened, yet these are both requisite to constitute animal existence. Besides these two principles, you have about you an immortal spirit, which must live for ever in a state of unspeakable bliss, or of infinite misery. This immortal spirit, dwelling in your animal frame, is that *third* principle which, joined to the other *two*, constitutes you a self-conscious intelligent Agent. These three, thus joined, do not make three men, but one man, so that it is neither contrary to, nor above reason, that One may be *three*, and *three*, ONE; for although you subsist Soul, Body and Spirit, you are not three Doctor Priestleys, but One Rational Dissenting Minister, or One Doctor Priestley.

The light of the sun which shines around me, affects only my eyes, and is therefore very distinct from the heat of that splendid luminary, which warms my whole body. This observation led me to examine the sky, to see if there were not two
 suns;

suns; one, consisting only of heat, and the other only of light. But I have not as yet found any, besides the old fashioned Sun, composed of light, and heat, *Two principles* *, but *One natural Luminary*. Even that little bit of fire, which falls to the share of some Authors, in the coldest days of winter, discovers three *somethings*, which seem essential to its very being. There is Light, Heat, and Motion; without which, I believe, you never saw a fire kindled in your study. The light is very different from the heat, the heat from the light; and both are distinct from that motion discernible in the fire. And yet there are not on this account three fires, but one.

Now, Sir, that an ignoramus, or what is much the same in your sense, an Orthodox Dissenter, should assert, that three distinct principles cannot exist, in one intelligent being, is no more than might be expected from their absurdity. But that a Rational Dissenter, such an adept in philosophy as yourself, should assert, that the truth contained in that proposition is contrary to reason, is not so easily to be accounted for: especially as you are a living proof of it in your own proper person. Indeed Doctor, whilst I see you and myself, consisting of soul, body, and spirit, you must permit me to deem it rational to believe, that the GODHEAD may subsist in FATHER, SON, and HOLY

* By principle, the Author does not mean that from which the sun derived its existence; but that which is essential to its existence.

Principles in physic, or of a natural body, is something that contributes to the essence of a body; or whereof a natural body is primarily constituted. *Chambers's Dictionary*.

Which authority, I presume, will warrant the observation immediately following upon the fire.

B 4 GHOST

GHOST *. — But if you ask, how these THREE are ONE, and this ONE is THREE? I must beg to be excused from giving you a positive answer, till you shall have favoured me with an exact account of your own subsistence in soul, body and spirit: How far these principles in your own frame are distinct from one another, and after what manner they are united together. I verily think we ought to explain our own essence, before we attempt to explain that of our Maker. But, that you may not think I want to evade any necessary enquiry, I hereby give it you under my hand, that the moment you shall have explained to me, in a satisfactory manner, the phenomena of the Sun, of the Fire, and of the human Nature, I shall join you, in studying to comprehend the Incomprehensible, and of finding out the Almighty to perfection: a task, believe me, in which few besides ourselves ever hoped for success; but what may not the vigilant exertion of our rational powers be able to accomplish?

However, Sir, although you differ from all the reformed Churches, as well as from Christ and all his Apostles, you have the happiness of perfectly agreeing with Mohammed the great prophet of the Turkish Church, and head of all Mussulmen; as you will see by turning to the Koran, chap. cxii. "*God is One God; the Eternal God; he begetteth not, neither is he begotten; and there is not any like unto him.*" No man could express the sense of Socinians in a more agreeable and masterly

* No more is aimed at here than to shew, that, among creatures, many may be pointed out, whose very being depends upon the union of distinct principles: The Author, invariably considering all attempts to explain the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, as daring and impious. What is seen may be defined in time; what is unseen, must be left to eternity to unfold.

manner,

manner, than this same Arabian *prophet* as it follows immediately has done, in his answer to the Koreish. You and this great prophet are perfectly agreed, "that God is One in person as well as in essence." The Christian Church has indeed in all ages been of a different opinion from Mohammed, believing in the ONLY BEGOTTEN of the FATHER full of grace and truth; and has thought that he could beget only his own image. Mohammed is in my opinion, however, rather more consistent than yourself, as he entirely excludes begetting in God, because, as he says, there is none like unto him: but you allow of begetting, and that, what is begotten of him, is the very image of his perfections; and at the same time, is but a man like ourselves. Of the two, commend me always to the most consistent, as the most rational, and fit to be followed.

It is now time, to shew your agreement with the same prophet, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth; but I beg leave to postpone it till I have the pleasure, and honour of writing to you again; which shall be as soon as I think you have fairly digested this.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

LET:

LETTER XI.

REVEREND SIR,

IT is beyond a doubt, that people have differed greatly in their opinions, respecting the person of Jesus Christ. Some have taken him to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, with Peter and the Disciples; to be Immanuel, God with us, or God manifested in the flesh, with Isaiah, and the apostle Paul; even to be the Child born, the Son given, who is the mighty God, the everlasting Father. But on the other hand, he was by a different set of men thought to be, but a *mere man like ourselves*; one that had no power, nor authority, but what was derived. Of this opinion were the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and Mohammed: of this opinion are Doctor Priestley, Mr. Graham, and all their Arian and Socinian brethren.

That you, Sir, differ from all the confessions ever made, by the reformed Churches, whether Lutheran, or Calvinistic, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is matter of your consolation, glorying and boasting. My business in this Letter, shall be to furnish you with greater grounds of boasting; by shewing the amazing affinity between your sentiments, and those of the prophetic Arabian, after whose doctrine, almost all the eastern world has wondered for the space of six hundred years and upwards. After such a feather added to the plumage of your cap, Will you ever in future, assert, “that you are ashamed of your connections with that absurd Shaver?”

To have such a colleague, as the great *Mohammed*, must no doubt yield you the highest satisfaction, and most exquisite delight; provided we can

but

but make clear your title to such a dignity ; a dignity which undoubtedly must add a lustre to the name of rational dissenter, already so honourable with the thinking and wise. Therefore I shall endeavour, in this epistle to point out the ONENESS of *Mohammedanism*, and what is by you, and your friends called *Rational Religion*.

You know, Sir, the leading principle of both religions, on the point before us, respecting Jesus of Nazareth is, "*That he is but a man like ourselves*;" or, as in some places you express it more emphatically, "*A man, in all respects, like ourselves*;" by which some would think, that even sin itself is not excepted ; for were that to be excepted, he could not be in all respects like ourselves ; unless, indeed, it could be proved that we are not sinners, and this perhaps might be attended with some degree of difficulty.

To investigate a subject of this importance requires some degree of method and perspicuity. We shall therefore begin with that position of yours, viz. "That Jesus Christ is not God, nor equal to God in any sense," always keeping in our view your entire agreement with the prophet Mohammed. That wonderful man expressly declares, * that "they are infidels, who say, verily God is Christ the Son of Mary." And again, † "The Christians say *Christ* is the Son of God. May God resist them. How are they infatuated ?" Surely, Doctor, no man could better have expressed your sentiments, than *Master Mohammed* has done. Your whole business, for years past, has been to oppose those who believe in Christ, as God over all blessed forevermore. With the Turkish prophet, you have not only charged all the Athanasians with infidelity, but even with idolatry.

Our

* Kor. ch. v. p. 133.

† Ch. ix. 244.

Our Archbishops and Bishops are all sworn Athanasians, and therefore according to you Idolaters, and according to Mohammed Infidels. This, Sir, is a specimen of your charity and candour, and must greatly tend to recommend rational Christianity, if opprobrious names are deemed the fittest arrows of conviction, and abuse the most proper method of manifesting our candour. Mohammed well knew, that the person who should be owned the only begotten SON of GOD, must be in all respects the only true and living GOD; on which account he considers it as infidelity and blasphemy to call Jesus by that name, SON of GOD. In this, therefore, he discovers more prudence than yourself, for, as I observed towards the close of my last, you own him to be the SON of GOD, and notwithstanding will have him to be no more than a man like yourself, forgetting the true character of the Child born, the SON given. That Mohammed then should deem the Christians infidels, for calling Jesus the SON of GOD, is not half so strange as your charging us with Idolatry, because we honour the SON, even as we honour the FATHER.

Making mention of the SON of GOD, brings to my mind a saying of yours*, where you address the people thus, "You have been taught to believe, that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is the SON of Man, as well as the SON of GOD, was *not Man*, but very and eternal God himself." I freely confess, that we have been taught to believe in him as the true GOD and eternal life; but then, Sir, we have been taught to believe in him as MAN also: therefore you have here done great injustice to our teachers, and ought to retract your assertion, if you wish to support your reputation for probity;

* Appeal, pag. 12.

probity; unless, indeed, you can vindicate it, and demonstrate, that we have actually been taught to believe, that Jesus is not a Man of the seed of David after the flesh.

Having had the felicity to point out the *one-ness* of the Mohammedan, with the rational faith of Socinians, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, we may now enquire how far you and that celebrated prophet are agreed, respecting his work and mission. The words of the *Koran** are very expressive, and analogous to your own absurd system. "O Mary; verily, God sendeth thee good tidings, that thou shalt bear the word † proceeding from himself; his name shall be CHRIST JESUS the Son of MARY; honourable in this world, and in the world to come, and one of those who approach near to the presence of God,—and he shall be righteous;—God shall teach him the Scriptures and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel, and shall appoint him his Apostle to the Children of Israel; and he shall say, verily, I come to you with a sign from the LORD; for I will perform miracles by *the permission of God*: I will heal him that hath been blind from his birth, and the leper; and I will raise the dead *by the permission of God*. I come to confirm the law which was revealed before me, and to allow unto you as lawful, part of that which hath been forbidden you—Therefore fear God and obey me. Verily, God is my LORD and your LORD; therefore serve him." The prophet Mohammed, in all this description of Jesus, hath rationally taken care to prevent his followers considering him as God; the better to prevent

* Chap. 3. page 63.

† Dr. P. says, Christ is called the Word of God, on account of his being in a more eminent manner commissioned to declare the will of God.

which,

which, he ascribes all his miracles to the permission of God, as is observed by his judicious Commentators *.

The Pharisees and Scribes were also of opinion, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; believing upon good grounds, that no man could do those works he did, unless God were with him to give him power to work such miracles; perfectly agreeing with Mohammed's notion, that Jesus wrought all his miracles by a Divine permission.

You also, and other Socinians, are firmly of opinion, that the whole of rational faith consists, in believing in CHRIST as a teacher sent from God, commissioned to work miracles, and to publish the new law called the Gospel; that is, so to moderate the old law, as to render the way of Salvation practicable and easy. You say †, "Christ being appointed the King and Judge of men, has powers given to him adapted to those offices, especially the knowledge of the human heart, and the prerogative of declaring the forgiveness of sin, which always accompanies regal authority; but being assisted by Divine wisdom and discernment, as well as by Divine power in the exercise of this high office; it is, in effect, the same thing, as the judgment and mercy of God displayed by the instrumentality of Jesus Christ."

To this agree the words of Mohammed ‡, "Jesus is no other than a servant, favoured with the gift of prophecy, appointed for an example to the children of ISRAEL; and he shall be a sign of the approach of the last hour." Here Jesus is a servant, consequently commissioned of God; favoured with the gift of prophecy; therefore, as you say, had communications from God, appointed

as

* Koran, pag. 64, Lett. c.

† Familiar illust. pag. 22. ‡ Kor. 360.

as an eminent example to ISRAEL, being commissioned to declare the will of God. So far, then, there is a perfect agreement between you and the great prophet of the Mussulmen; as you may see in the foregoing quotation from *Al Koran*.

Orthodox Christians in every place, and in every age, have, indeed, embraced the Redeemer of mankind, as the blessed IMMANUEL, GOD manifest in the flesh. But the respectable Pharisees, Scribes, and Doctors of old, the Mohammedans, the Socinians and Arians, are all united in opposition to his proper and personal Deity, even when they acknowledge him a Teacher sent from God, and performing works peculiar to himself.

Once more, reverend Sir, Mohammed and you are perfectly agreed, respecting the ignorance of Christ, as to the day of Judgment. You say *, "Notwithstanding the Divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark xiii. 32. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." The Orthodox, to be sure, have always understood our blessed Lord as speaking here of his human nature only; and not without ground suppose, that, seeing as a Divine person, he does whatsoever the FATHER does, he must as such know, whatsoever the FATHER knoweth. Moreover, that the FATHER, in many passages of Scripture, intends the Deity in the Unity of its Essence, and the Son, the man Jesus, or the human nature of the Redeemer, standing in union with the Divine nature. Hence they suppose, that whatsoever might be hidden from

* Appeal 13.

from him as *Man*, was not hidden from him as a Divine person. Some even think, that although this secret was hidden from Jesus, as man, during the first or second year of his ministry, it was certainly revealed to him afterwards. Because he himself asserts, that all judgment is committed to the Son, which they think requires an infallible knowledge, *how, when, and whom* to judge, which could not be possessed, were the time of judgment concealed from him. Yea, he farther declares, that all power in heaven and earth was given unto him, which surely implies the knowledge of the proper times for the execution of this power.

But Sir, altho' my idolatrous Brethren, the Orthodox, and myself, have the infelicity of thus differing from the rational and virtuous Socinians; Mohammed the Great, declares himself entirely on your side of the question. Hear him, ye Socinian Doctors *, " They will ask thee (says Gabriel) concerning the last hour, at what time its coming is fixed? Answer, verily, the knowledge thereof is with my LORD; none shall declare the fixed time thereof except he. The knowledge thereof is with GOD alone; but the greater part of men know it not." This prophet goes even somewhat farther, and alledgeth five things, of which he says, Jesus was ignorant. Thus from the most perfect agreement between rational Christians and Mohammedans, in the essentials of religion, I think we have the fairest prospect of accomplishing an union.

Nothing now remaining but a few circumstances, which may easily be got over by men of genius and resolution.

The only difficulty to settle is, whether Jesus and rational Christianity, or Mohammed and the Turkish religion, shall be embraced? To deter-

* Kor. ch. vii. 219.

determine which, it will be necessary to enquire after the manner of Dr. Abbadie, which of them, according to your system of rational religion, was the best preacher, and maintained the fairest and most consistent character, as a good man, commissioned of God to be an instructor of mankind. The consequence of which will be, that either the Socinian scheme must be reprobated, and the doctrines of Orthodoxy be embraced, or we must all become Mohammedans, in order to preserve a consistent character. Then, Sir, I presume, that you and myself will bid fair for being two of the first characters of the new modelled church; a character surely not unworthy of the utmost exertion of all our rational powers.

In great hope of success, and the dawnings of that approaching glory,

I remain,

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

C L E T.

LETTER XII.

REVEREND SIR,

YOU will recollect, that in the close of my last, I promised to attend to the resolution of that important point, whether the religion of Jesus, according to the Socinian Hypothesis, or that of the prophet Mohammed shall be universally embraced; as you know it must be a very desirable thing to have only one religion over the whole world; and especially, if we could get ourselves promoted to be leaders in that blessed system, and plan of operation.

The whole matter will, I imagine, rest on this single article, which of the two prophets appears to be most faithful, wise, charitable, and zealous for the glory of God; or, in other words, whether Christ or Mohammed is the better man, and sustains the most consistent character. This is, indeed, a matter of hazardous enquiry, and what few besides rational Christians would dare to attempt; what I at least should not be bold enough to undertake, had the subject been entirely new. But the ingenious, judicious Dr. Abbadie has paved my way, in his excellent Treatise on Christ's Divinity; a Treatise which I earnestly recommend to the perusal of every rational Christian, every intelligent Dissenter.

The nature of the subject requires a considerable degree of seriousness, therefore you will be obliging enough to forgive me, if I should dismiss the smile, which used to play on my countenance when I dealt in controversy heretofore. The present disquisition is no less serious, than, to determine for certainty, whether you, Sir, and your rational brethren, be blasphemers; or myself, and the

the rest of the Orthodox be Idolaters, as you have most candidly represented us.

There is an infinite distance, you know, between the Creator, and the most dignified of all his creatures; therefore God cannot be represented as a mere creature without blasphemy, nor can the creature be adored as God, without the most monstrous Idolatry. If then, JESUS CHRIST be the true God and eternal life, it must be blasphemy to say, "that he is but a man like ourselves." And if he is but a man like ourselves, or but a mere Creature, how dignified soever, we must be guilty of shocking Idolatry, in worshipping him, even as we worship the FATHER, as God over all, blessed for ever more*. You cannot be offended, Sir, with my bringing the matter to this issue, seeing you have so illiberally charged the Orthodox with Idolatry, though it should even turn out, that, before I have done, I should convict you yourself, of blasphemy against God in the human nature, and the grossest rebellion against your Judge, of which you are capable. If I worship him according to the Scriptures, you must be condemnable for rejecting him; and I must be condemnable for worshipping him, provided he is that mere Creature you are pleased to represent him.

It is an observation made by some, that those who doubt the Divinity of Jesus Christ, must also doubt the Divinity of the Scriptures. Which observation seems to be warranted, from the proceedings of rational Christians in our day. One nibbles at this part of the sacred volume, another nibbles at that; for instance, the Song of Solomon is very offensive to some, the Apocalypse to others; whilst some of their brethren are equally

* Vid. Dr. Abbadie, pag. 6, of his Treatise on Christ's Divinity.

offended with the book of Daniel, part of the Prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah, some of the Psalms, and many passages of even the Pentateuch itself. Which spirit of Scepticism evidently betrays a doubt of the authenticity of the whole volume of inspiration. This accounts for the new name (not on a white-stone) given by some to rational Dissenters, I mean that of *Christian Deists*; for which distinction they have as yet discovered very little thankfulness to their benefactors. The Trinitarians, on their part, think it not consistent to suppose, that God should create a whole race of rational intelligent beings, and leave them without any given law, any obligation to walk according to his will; therefore they conclude, that some revelation of his mind has been given and preserved in the world for the general use of mankind; that wherever it is given, it must be an entire perfect revelation. They have carefully examined all the writings of the learned and wise, from Moses down to Dr. Priestley, and find, on examination, that no book bids so far for being that inspired Code of laws, as this same blessed, though antiquated book, the Bible; consequently the carpings and cavillings of modern sceptics, against this and the other part of revelation, cannot to them be very agreeable.

You have been pleased to dignify our people with the name of Idolaters. When this fit of zeal for rational religion was upon you, I hope you considered maturely the import of the charge, as opposite to the glory of God and our own salvation, and indeed incompatible with either. Idolatry introduceth more Gods than one, as Mohammed charges all the Christians with doing, and with which you yourself are pleased to charge all the Orthodox, *i. e.* the king upon the throne,

the bishops upon the bench, all the conscientious clergy of the established church, as well as those among Dissenters, who can subscribe the doctrinal articles of the Church of England. Indeed to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, as we do, if he is, as you say, only a man like ourselves, must be more contrary to the glory of God than the grossest Paganism. This is to advance a mere creature, yea, a creature not of the highest order in the creation, to all intents and purposes, to an equality with the infinite Jehovah. Idolatry more shocking than was ever devised in nations, the most barbarous, for they never exalted their subordinate Deities, to an equality with him whom they accounted supreme*. Idolatry then, Sir, being so very heinous in itself, so dreadful in its consequences, and the worshipping of Jesus Christ as God, equal to the Father, being the very worst species of idolatry, according to you and the prophet Mohammed; it is high time it were eradicated, and a more consistent system adopted.

You say, that there are not THREE that bear record in heaven, and in effect, that it is a villainously interpolated passage which asserts there are. The prophet *Mohammed* also has repeatedly declared

* Hear, therefore, and consider, ye Orthodox; your religion is the rankest of all Idolatry, if it is true that your Redeemer is but a mere Man, in all respects like yourselves. Know assuredly, that Christian Idolatry is the very worst Idolatry that ever was invented.

It is as contrary to the true interests of the immortal soul, as it is to the glory of God. For if you are Idolaters, according to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's representation, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; consequently you must all be damned. Idolaters are shut out from the kingdom of God; this rational gentleman has proved (I mean, asserted) that all *Trinitarians* are Idolaters, therefore you must either be shut out, or he must appear to be a lying prophet, as well as his friend Mohammed.

his implacable enmity against the Doctrine of the TRINITY, as irreconcilable to his scheme of reformation. According to this, it will, it must appear, that Christianity had, by some fatality, corrupted the true religion, and that Mohammed restored it to its pristine purity. That the immediate followers of Jesus worshipped him as God, let their writings bear witness: and that in after ages, that corruption was indulged, your own writings sufficiently testify; therefore, beyond a doubt, religion was corrupted in the first ages of Christianity, seeing the people were then addicted to worship the SON, even as they worshipped the FATHER. But *Mohammed* arose, a great prophet and reformer; he corrected the errors of Christianity, and taught the people to worship ONE GOD, in one person only, just as you would have us to do; and to obey one prophet, even as you would wish a teacher sent from God to be obeyed. The Orthodox, indeed, in an invariable manner, have to this day continued to worship FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; believing that there is no medium between CHRIST's being the true GOD, the same in essence with the FATHER, or his being an arrant *Impostor*, influenced by the spirit of Satan. But the *rationalists* having imbibed the spirit of *Mohammed*, adopted the doctrines of the *Koran*, are concerned every where to destroy the worship of the TRINITY; and especially that of JESUS CHRIST, setting up in its stead the worship of ONE GOD in one person only, and reducing JESUS, his prophet, to a level with themselves; a mere man, such as Mohammed professed himself to be. Thus it is clear to a demonstration, that the fathers have in all ages been corrupters of religion, and that the author of the *Koran*, and the Socinian Doctors have been, and still are, the true reformers, who

who teach us not to receive, nor acknowledge the MYSTERY OF GOD, AND OF THE FATHER, AND OF CHRIST.

So striking the harmony between Mohammed and yourself, and so very pertinent the language of his *Koran*, that I have often wondered, why you quoted not his authority to authenticate your doctrine, and to confound the orthodox. Permit me, Sir, to refer you to the prophet himself*.

“O ye who have received the Scriptures! Exceed not the just bounds in your religion, by raising Jesus to an *equality* with God; neither say of God any other than the truth. Verily, CHRIST JESUS, the Son of MARY, is the apostle of God, and his WORD, which he conveyed into MARY, and a spirit proceeding from him. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not THERE ARE THREE GODS: forbear this, it will be better for you. God is but One God. Far be it from him, that he should have a Son—Christ doth not proudly disdain to be a servant unto God.”

Again, yet more, if possible, to our purpose †,

“They are surely Infidels who say, verily, God is CHRIST, the Son of MARY: since CHRIST said, O children of Israel! Serve God, my LORD and your LORD. Whoever shall give a companion to God, God shall exclude him from paradise, and his habitation shall be hell fire. They are certainly infidels who say, God is the third, of *Three*; for there is no God, beside ONE GOD. And if they refrain not from what they say, a painful torment shall surely be inflicted on such of them as are unbelievers.—CHRIST, the Son of MARY, is no more than an apostle; and his mother was a woman of veracity.—Behold how we declare them

* Kor. Ch. iv. 126.

† Ch. v. p. 146.

the signs of God's Unity ; and then behold, how they turn aside from the truth ? Say, will ye worship any besides God, &c."

Now from this long quotation from the prophet Mohammed, would not any body take him for a rational Dissenter, educated by such a tutor as Dr. Taylor, or Dr. Priestley ? Or, in other words, Would not one, who is well acquainted with the fundamentals of the Turkish religion, on reading your polemical pamphlets, be apt to mistake you for a Mohammedan ? I mean, respecting those essential principles of religion, the Doctrines of the TRINITY, and the DIVINITY OF JESUS.

The worshipping of FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST, as *three persons* in the union of the divine essence, you say, "is the grand corruption of Christianity, and, indeed, hath changed it into idolatry". The restoring of it therefore to its purity must be a great and good work, such as could not be effected by any other spirit, than that of truth. Now Mohammed hath effectually reformed this abuse, and has purged all the eastern world from that idolatry, to which their forefathers were addicted, in worshipping the LORD JESUS CHRIST, as in union with FATHER and the HOLY GHOST. How is it then, that he can be that impostor he is represented, seeing the first principles of his religion are founded according to you, in the purest truth, and he hath been the author of such a great reformation, as restoring religion from the worst kind of Idolatry, to the worship of ONE GOD, and the acknowledgment of Jesus, as a teacher divinely commissioned ? Without doubt, this notable prophet was under the influence of either a good or a bad spirit. If of a good spirit, he cannot be an impostor ; if of a bad spirit, how could he work
such

such a reformation? Did the Devil consider it as his interest to have Christian Idolatry abolished, if to worship Jesus be idolatry, as you assert? Surely this would be to have Satan divided against himself; a practice contrary to the uniform tenour of his conduct. In short it must follow, that either God is to be worshipped in TRINITY in UNITY, and Jesus embraced as the adorable GOD-MAN; or that Mohammed was the true prophet of the living God. That is, in plain terms, so long as you and your friends reject the LORD JESUS CHRIST as LORD and GOD, you must own yourselves to be Mohammedans, instead of rational Dissenters.

If God is not to be worshipped as TRINITY in UNITY; if JESUS is not to be received as the adorable GOD-MAN, it follows, that the whole Christian church has been in a state of the most monstrous idolatry for time immemorial; consequently that none of the Orthodox have entered into the kingdom of heaven. But if there are THREE that bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST; and if these THREE are ONE, it will follow, that Mohammed and his Socinian brethren are guilty of blasphemy, and must be turned over to the disposal of a just and equitable judge, who is declaredly jealous of his own glory.

Having taken up much more time than at first was intended in the preliminary part of my letter, I shall have room for little more, than to propose the plan of our future correspondence; I mean, in the present series of epistles. The leading design, you know, is either to have what you call rational religion renounced as a dangerous, enthusiastical, and fanatical delusion; or, having your rational doctrine sufficiently authenticated, to establish the pure religion of the Mohammedans upon

upon your foundation: In order to which, I shall shew,

1. That if Jesus Christ be nothing more than a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser man than him, or all the prophets who went before him, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers.

2. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was more truly benevolent, and exerted himself more for the benefit of mankind, than did Jesus of Nazareth.

3. If but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a more honest, and a better man, a far greater, and more consistent divine preacher.

4. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed discovered far more concern than Christ did for the glory of God and the purity of religion.

These shocking propositions being properly cleared up, it will appear either, that the *Koran of Mohammed* contains the true religion; or what you call rational Christianity, is the rankest and most blasphemous enthusiasm ever yet invented to defile this world. And that according to your doctrines, Mohammed must, in all respects, have the pre-eminence: But according to the principles of the everlasting gospel, he will appear to be that false prophet, associated with the beast of Rome, and Jesus Christ shall retain his glory unsullied, and his dominion for ever entire.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Your most humble Servant.

J. MACGOWAN.

L E T.

LETTER XIII.

REVEREND SIR,

THE subject of this letter, being an attempt uncommonly daring, would require a degree of resolution and intrepidity, far superior to what I possess; I must therefore beg you will candidly cover, with the mantle of charity, what defects soever may spring from my timidity and ignorance; when treating on a subject of such very rare and singular discussion, as to prove the following alarming proposition. “ *If Jesus Christ, the author of the Christian religion, be but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser Man than he, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers.*”

The wisdom of a man, as Dr. Abbadie observes, essentially consists in choosing the fittest means for attaining the end proposed. Therefore, Sir, what lies now before us is, to consider their different ends in the establishment of their different religions, seeing they severally stand up as **HEADS** of the two greatest sects of religionists in the whole world.

Mohammed's design in the establishment of his religion, as acknowledged and declared by himself, was to make known the *supreme God, to be the only living and true God*, far exalted above every other Being whatever: “ *To shew that he hath no issue, no partaker with him of the Divine nature, nor any similitude whatever.*” That this was the prophet Mohammed's leading design, will appear from his own words in a variety of places in the *Koran*. Where he sets forth the perfections of his heavenly Majesty, in a magnificent manner, and frequently insists on his alone right to religious adoration. I might refer you to the
various

various passages of that uncommon book, did I not consider you as an adept in the Mussulmen learning.

That Mohammed laid his plan of reformation with the utmost sagacity and wisdom, his success, and the fruits of his doctrine testify. There is but one way by which we can judge of a preacher; that is, by the fruits of his doctrine: and he must be a great reformer, indeed, who actually gains his point in every respect. Mohammed actually gained his proposed end effectually. He has so restored the worship of ONE GOD, *in one person only*; that for six hundred years and more, not one of all his numerous followers, have ever attempted to honour the SON, even as they honoured the FATHER, any more than if they had been bred *rational Dissenters*, or Christian Deists. This, you must allow, demonstrates the unspeakable propriety of the measures, his sagacity pointed out, and the power with which his doctrine was accompanied. And all this was done consistently enough, with the utmost indulgence of sensual gratification; for *Mohammed* was none of those reformers, who deem the crucifixion of the flesh necessary; as his eleven wives could have testified, not to mention his concubines. Here was such wisdom, as neither Christ nor his apostles ever pretended to. They had not the least notion of people getting to heaven, any other way than by that of the Cross. They considered a coalition between the world and true religion, as a thing impracticable, and therefore never attempted it. But the sagacious *Mohammed*, both projected and executed that desirable scheme, and he has been followed by the whole race of rational Christians with success, not a little flattering to their hopes, of an entire extirpation of the religion of the Cross.

To

To turn now from the prophet of the Turkish church, let us a little enquire into the measures taken by Jesus of Nazareth. Compare his success with the former, and we shall see, that in reality there is no comparison.

If, as you say *, “ *It be perfectly clear from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that the person who is distinguished by the name of the Father, is the only true God, exclusive of the Son, or any other Being whatever,*” it must follow, that the leading design of his coming into the world was to establish the pure worship of the Father only, exclusive of every other Being, and that this worship must be the first principle of genuine Christianity.

If so, his success has been far inferior to that of the Turkish prophet, with respect both to the numbers of his followers, and the duration of his system in its purity. In point of number, Jesus has had very few followers, rational enough to worship ONE GOD, under any other notion besides that of TRINITY in UNITY; and even in our age, enlightened as it is, by your own confession, the number of rational Christians is very scanty. Whereas the successful *Mohammed*, has converted almost all the oriental world; so that, what was said of lady Diana of Ephesus, *that all Asia, and the world received her religion*, is more true when applied to Mohammed.

The Arabian religion has continued in its purity from its first institution, respecting its grand fundamental CREED; the whole Turkish church most stedfastly believe, “ there is but ONE GOD, and that *Mohammed* is his prophet,” and is as orthodox now as in the days of the prophet himself. But if the doctrine of the TRINITY be as you say, *the grand corruption of Christianity*, it will appear, that

* Fam. Illust. p. 12.

that Christ's religious system actually began to fall to pieces within the times of the apostles themselves. For in those times you tell us, "That mystery of iniquity began to work." Now, Sir, as we have no other method of forming a right judgment of causes, besides the effects naturally produced by them, we are under an unavoidable necessity of preferring the measures taken by *Mohammed*, to those adopted by *Jesus*, the founder of the Christian religion. Of consequence, how shocking is ever of thinking, that he was the wiser man, and taught his disciples with more force of argument; *Mohammed* delivered his doctrine in language plain and perspicuous, no way equivocal or ambiguous, roundly testifying, that they were Infidels who believed in CHRIST'S DIVINITY, or in the doctrine of the TRINITY. But when *Jesus* institutes the worship of ONE God, the FATHER only; what language does he use? "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever (I) have commanded you*."

This, you know, was his last injunction to his disciples, and what is very properly considered as the institution of the Christian religion. And surely, if he hereby instituted the worship of the person of the FATHER only, as you will have it, he was extremely unhappy in his mode of expression, and indeed gave occasion to the corruption of his own religion, by the ambiguity of his language.

The words of an institution of such importance should be plain and perspicuous! But who, upon reading this text, could at first glance imagine, that the worship of the Father only was intended?

That

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

That although the SON and the HOLY GHOST are named along with him in the same act of worship, they are not to be worshipped with him, under pain of damnation? It is certain, that if Jesus, in this passage, instituted the pure worship of the FATHER only, exclusive of the SON and the HOLY GHOST; he has done it in such a manner, as to render his injunction totally useless to the far greater part of his professing followers. For now more than one thousand seven hundred years are elapsed; and but a very few to this day are capable of understanding his real meaning. Indeed, how should they? Seeing his immediate disciples, on many occasions, spake in such a style as evidently implies Deity; which obscurity of theirs, undoubtedly arose from the ambiguity of those expressions, in which their LORD and Master chose to deliver his doctrine. But I shall have occasion to give you a sample of their doctrine in a future letter; shall therefore proceed in this to shew, that if JESUS CHRIST is in all respects a man, and only a man like ourselves, Mohammed acted more consistently in speaking of himself.

When shall we ever find him declaring, that God and himself are one?—That those who had seen him, had seen the FATHER all—That he came forth from the Father?—Or naming himself along with the FATHER, in one of the most solemn acts of religious worship? On the contrary, he frankly acknowledges himself not only to be a mere man, but even to be a sinner. But all these things are asserted by Jesus Christ concerning himself, and he asks, who can convince me of sin? Was it a likely way to persuade the people, that God and he are two distinct Beings, to tell them, that he and the FATHER are ONE. Could

he find no other way of establishing the worship of the FATHER *only*, than by asking Philip, "Have I been so long with you Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me, hath seen the FATHER; and how sayest thou, shew us the FATHER? Believest thou not that I am in the FATHER and the FATHER IN ME, &c.*"

And pray what could Philip make of all this, on supposition, that his Master were in all respects but a mere man like himself? Does this bear any likeness to that clear and nervous stile in which the *Koran* is written? Has not such a declaration, an evident tendency to confound Christ with the Deity, as one object of religious adoration?

One of these three things must necessarily result from the above declaration made by Christ to Philip.

1. That if he never meant to be considered as having proper Deity appertaining to him; he certainly was not a master of his own language, and did not know the influence his doctrine would produce upon the minds of men, in leading them into idolatry, by worshipping the SON, even as they worshipped the FATHER; considering the FATHER and the SON, in his divine nature, as one in essence.—Yet the Christian idolaters, of every age and nation, have uniformly produced this text as a divine warrant for their procedure.

2. If ignorance was not the cause of such ill-judged equivocal expressions, we must have recourse to a cause still more *shocking* and tremendous to name. I mean, an impious design to impose upon the understandings of men, by making them believe, HE and the FATHER were ONE, when, in reality, they were as distant from each other,

* John xiv. 9, 10.

other, as the distance between the *Creator* and the *creature*. Yea, he evidently leads Philip to seek for the FATHER *no where*, but as dwelling in, and being manifested by himself. How shocking are the consequences of Socinianism? For were that doctrine true, CHRIST must be a far greater impostor than *Mohammed*; as all the abominations of the *Koran*, fall infinitely short of CHRIST himself, and by his apostles confounding him perpetually with God. The abominations of the *Koran* are in a manner sanctified by the inviolable regard through the whole of it, uniformly paid to the *unity* of God.

3. If after all, it should be alledged that Jesus Christ is no impostor, but the true and faithful witness; so far from ignorance, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge dwell in him; that, therefore, he well knew the effects which his doctrine would produce upon the hearts of his followers, it must follow, that in union with the FATHER and HOLY GHOST, he is the true God and eternal life: even God over all, blessed for ever more. But more of this in a subsequent letter, this being thrown in now, only as a preparative for what I farther intend. I shall therefore conclude the present with this observation. Namely, that if JESUS CHRIST be essentially *One* with the FATHER, as with my whole heart and soul I believe he is, it was quite natural for him to declare himself to be what he really is, and to address Philip in the above manner. Quite natural for him to join his own name with those of the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, in the administration of baptism; that he should perform miracles by his own personal authority, and suffer himself to be adored as LORD and God.

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But

But then, what will be the consequence of all this, less than that, *Mohammed* was a vile impostor; that all who deny Christ's proper Deity, are found guilty of the most abominable blasphemy: And that proud reason must be obliged to confess, it cannot comprehend the Almighty to perfection?

I am,

REVEREND, SIR, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER

LETTER XIV.

REVEREND SIR,

IN my last I shewed, that, if the Socinian hypothesis be the genuine doctrine of Christianity, Mohammed must have been a far wiser man, and was much more successful in establishing the true doctrine, and worship of the Creator than Jesus; notwithstanding, in performing this dreadful task; which nothing but real zeal for the honour of my divine Master could justify, my flesh shuddered with horror. How much more, when in this and the subsequent Letters I clearly prove, That if JESUS CHRIST be no more than a mere man like ourselves, Mohammed was not only a greater preacher, but a better man?

If it is idolatry to worship the Son; which it must be, if he is a mere creature; both of which you roundly assert; and if idolatry is so criminal in the sight of God, that those who are guilty of it, shall not inherit the kingdom of Heaven, it may be truly said, that *Mohammed* exerted himself more, for the good of mankind than Jesus did; and that we have profited more by his endeavours, than by all that Jesus did and suffered. This proposition may perhaps at first make you stare, but you will be obliged either to allow it, or what will be as mortifying, to own, that you have grievously blasphemed the name of the LORD Jesus my Redeemer.

At the time when Mohammed arose, a great prophet in Arabia, the whole world lay in, either Pagan, or Christian Idolatry, Jews and avowed Atheists, only excepted. All that bore the Christian name were either Trinitarians or Arians;

the first you know, you yourself have dignified with the name of Idolaters; the last, adoring CHRIST as a subordinate Deity, or deputed God, were likewise guilty of idolatry, though less gross than the former in its kind. I say, less gross in its kind; seeing, of all idolatry, none is so rank and shocking, as that which exalts a mere man to a perfect equality with the FATHER ALMIGHTY. Consequently, no idolatry so fatal to the true interests of immortal souls. This being the case, *Mohammed* exerted himself in such a manner, as to rescue the people from this idolatry, as far as he could carry his influence; and where there was a defect in his manner of persuasion, it was amply made up by the weight of his authority. For that prophet was one of the many, who have assumed a right, to compel people to enter the gates of Salvation, precisely in the manner which they direct. Now, if deliverance from idolatry of the most damnable nature, is any blessing, what amazing advantage has the world received from *Mohammed*. The many nations who have embraced his religion, are all worshippers of God in *Unity*, and are all therefore, according to you, delivered from idolatry, and must of consequence be in a state of salvation.

On the other hand, what has Jesus done for the benefit of mankind, that may in any wise be compared with this, upon supposition, the Socinian scheme be true? We allow that he went about healing all manner of diseases. But what is the performing a few cures, upon individuals, when compared with the redemption of the world from idolatry. As for the Jews, to whom he was primarily sent, *they had* been cured of idolatry, before he was born of the Virgin, and at that momentous period, the bulk of that people most stre-

strenuously adhered to the worship of the FATHER only ; a few persons excepted, who were waiting for God to be manifested in the flesh, which manifestation they accounted the consolation of Israel, and who worshipped God as Trinity in Unity.

It cannot even be said, that he saved any part of the Gentile world from idolatry ; seeing that, when converted to the Christian faith, they only changed their worship from bad to worse. As undoubtedly it was less criminal to worship Diana, as a descendant of Jove, than to adore a mere Creature as JEHOVAH'S EQUAL in power and glory. The moment the pagans left their native gods they embraced the IDOL of the Christians ; so that it cannot be said, Jesus delivered any body from idolatry, according to your absurd scheme of irrational and unscriptural Divinity. If it be said, he taught the purest morality ever known in the world, I am not disposed to deny it, but to say, What avails the best system of morality, if the first principles of religion are left corrupt. The best morality founded upon idolatrous principles, will avail but little with a jealous God. And yet this must, according to your notion, be all, that the best of Christians ever enjoyed. In what a deplorable condition then, must Christ have left his people at his departure ? Alas, ye Trinitarians, what must become of you ?

Should it be added, " He gave his life in order to confirm the faith of his people ; " It may be replied, " so have thousands of the Christian idolaters, worshippers of the TRINITY ; " but what are we the better for that, if we are still left in a state of idolatry ? Besides, what real advantage to his followers, could a mere man like ourselves propose, by laying down his life for them ? What

virtue could there be in his, more than in our own sufferings and death? What a parade is here, about laying down his life to confirm the faith of his people, when in reality, the far greater part of those, who are called by his name, remain to this day in a state of idolatry?

Moreover, if the death of Christ was designed to answer no higher ends, than to confirm the faith of his people, in the doctrine he taught, it gives the prophet Mohammed another advantage over him, which I thought not of before, under the head of Wisdom. I have observed, that Mohammed never discovered any great inclination to mortify his own flesh; much less did he ever think of giving his life, to confirm the truths of *Al Koran*; but then, he had wisdom enough to take such measures, as to render personal suffering altogether unnecessary. He thoroughly confirmed the faith of his followers, without putting himself to such vast expence, of either labour or blood. It cannot be difficult to determine which of two prophets is the greatest, from such circumstances as these: seeing that, although Christ gave even his very life, in order to obtain his end, he could not accomplish it by confirming the faith of his people, who run directly into the worship of the TRINITY, and of himself, as a DIVINE PERSON: but Mohammed accomplished his utmost wish, without any such sufferings, which, undoubtedly, argues the superior propriety of the measures he adopted; and this you know implies superior wisdom. For although the giving of his life, might in some sense be an evidence of good will towards the children of men, it cannot upon your plan of doctrine, be understood as any proof of CHRIST's wisdom; seeing all that has been done thereby, might have been accomplished without his dying.

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It is not difficult to shew, that if JESUS CHRIST is but a mere man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was the best and most consistent prophet that ever appeared in the world. The scripture prophets for the most part, if not generally, came with the power of working miracles, yet could not restrain the people from idolatry; but he restrained from, nay, rooted out idolatry without pretending to one miracle. From Moses down to Malachi, they bare witness to CHRIST who was to come; but it was in such a manner, as to give the people room to think, that the promised Messiah, was something more than a mere creature; most of them absolutely confounded him with the DEITY; and some of them even ascribes DEITY, and all the works of creation to him in person. David, in the spirit of prophesy, for instance, saith unto the SON, "Thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever, the scepter of thy kingdom, is a right scepter *". By which address one could not readily conceive, that the psalmist expected the singers upon *Shoshanim*, to intend no more than, "Jesus, thou art but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves," and yet, according to your irrational scheme, he must have intended nothing farther.

Another instance of the absurdity of this prophet, we have in Psal. cii. 25, 26, 27. Still addressing the SON OF GOD, he says, "Of old, hast thou laid the foundations of the earth: and the heavens, the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." This prophet must be considered, as be-

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ing either inspired by the Spirit of God, or not inspired. If inspired, then we expect from him the words of truth and soberness, even the very mind of God, with respect to what he delivers; and at the same time we have a right to suppose, that he means what he speaks, whether it be to God or man. Of course, if he calls Jesus, God, whilst he knows him to be none other than a mere man, we have reason to question his being at all inspired. If uninspired, here must be an impious combination between him and the apostle to the Hebrews, to set up CHRIST not only as a pre-existent being, but as the GOD and MAKER of all things, by which means the professors of religion have been misled into that monstrous idolatry, of worshipping JESUS as none other than GOD MANIFESTED in the flesh. I say, misled them, for what man of sober sense, could suppose at first view, that with all this majestic parade of fine words, and hyperbolical expressions, the writer meant no more, than that the person, of whom he speaks, is a mere man like ourselves, and had no existence at all prior to being born of the Virgin; consequently, that he had not the least hand in laying the foundation of the earth and the heavens? To come at which sense, will require all the efforts of human wisdom, that is, all the subtilties of Sophistry, and all the arts of evasion, and perversion. But—What shall we think or say, when we find the apostle putting David's words into the mouth of the Father Almighty, as he does Heb. i. As if David's testimony was thought insufficient, unless it proceeded from him who is of one mind, and cannot be turned? This serves only to embarrass us the more: for who can hear God the Father thus address his Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, &c. and from thence conclude, that
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the Son is but a mere man like ourselves? Or thus, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands, and still conclude, that the person thus addressed by the Father, had no being till within these 1800 years?"

This is consistent enough, and a glorious description of the SON OF GOD, on supposition, that, in union with the FATHER and HOLY GHOST, he be the true God and eternal life; but must be absolute nonsense, if your doctrine is true. It is ridiculous, for preachers to make use of ambiguous and hyperbolical expressions, such as must be bolted to the bran, before, we can come at their real meaning, and that is the reason why I prefer Doctor Priestley to all the Arian and Socinian authors I have ever read. You speak so plainly, that he must be a blockhead indeed, who does not understand your meaning; for which reason, I am of opinion, you will do more good to real Christianity, than all the preachers of the Socinian scheme, that ever went before you.

You have attempted to frame an excuse for the abstruse, ambiguous, and equivocal stile in which the scriptures are written, according to your plan of doctrine, from the manners of the Orientals, whose speech abounds with bold and striking figures. But I think there can be no beauty in any figure which tends to obscure, and less still, in that which tends to invert a doctrine. The true beauty of figurative language, lies in its explicative quality; whereas, all those passages of scripture by you referred to, are darkened by figures ill-chosen and misapplied. If the scriptures have suffered so much through the manner of writing amongst the Orientals, as to embarrass rational gentlemen in their expositions of them; one
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would really wonder, how the *Koran* came to be so perspicuous, as to render it impossible for the reader to be at a loss about the author's meaning, when speaking of the person of God, and of CHRIST, seeing he was an East countryman, as much an *Oriental* as any of the penmen of the sacred Scriptures.

He speaks very respectfully of JESUS, but then he always observes a consistency with himself, and with his leading design, "of restoring the worship of ONE GOD, in One person only." Never shall you find him addressing a mere man like himself after this manner, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness, is the sceptre of thy kingdom: thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Thou LORD hast, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; they all shall wax-old, as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." From which address it is clear to a demonstration, that David himself either worshipped the SON, as the GOD and MAKER of all things, and so was an idolater like the rest of the Trinitarians, or that he imposed upon mankind, by writing that for their learning, which, in reality, he did not believe himself.

But Mohammed is clearly on your side of the question; and as he fully believed JESUS CHRIST to be but a man, in all respects like himself, he judiciously guarded against every thing that might induce mankind to think more highly of the prophet

phet of Nazareth. There is not one expression in the whole *Koran*, that in the least tends to confound the person of JESUS CHRIST with the DEITY. Wherefore I conclude, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more intelligent and consistent prophet than David, and therefore the *Koran* is preferable to the book of *Psalms*.

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

REVEREND SIR,

THE prophet next in eminence, as a penman of the scriptures, is that noble Isaiah, of whom so many encomiums have been given by Christian writers: but who, in my opinion, falls exceedingly short of the prophet Mohammed, in clearness of stile and strength of reasoning; on supposition that God never did, nor never could exist in TRINITY, and that Jesus Christ is no more than a mere man like ourselves. The first passage of this phophecy, remarkable for its obscurity and ambiguity, is that *, Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel;” quoted by the evangelist Matthew †, and by you explained away as far as could well be done with convenience.

As you have brought the art of explaining, away, an adverse passage of scripture almost to a perfect system, I shall do myself the pleasure, for the public benefit, to transcribe some of your remarks in all their strength and beauty. “ If we consider other instances of names imposed by the divine direction in the scriptures, we shall find, that they do not always express any thing characteristic of the person on whom they are imposed, but that they were intended to be a memorial of some divine promise or assurance, respecting things of a public and general concern.—The Divine Being, by appointing Christ to be called *Immanuel*, engaged to manifest his own presence with his people, by protecting and blessing them, and inflicting vengeance on their enemies and oppressors.

* Chap. vii. 14. † Chap. i. 23. ‡ Famil. Illust. p. 28.

For this prediction was given upon the occasion, of an invasion by the Israelites and Syrians."

I would not be guilty of denying, that this ingenious explanation has for ever disabled this prediction, from being of any use to the Christian system, being tied down precisely to a particular occasion and period : but at the same time it serves to shew the obscurity of the prophet, as very far inferior to *Mohammed*, in point of perspicuity ; especially when we take the prediction in its connection with the circumstances attending its fulfilment. It is not easy to conceive, how the terrified Jews could be inspired with courage, from being told, that, in about the space of 740 years afterwards, a young woman, a Virgin, should bear a Son, whose name should signify *God with us* ; nor indeed how the future birth of this extraordinary Child, should prove the present destruction of those two smoking fire-brands, *Rezin* and *Pekab*, especially seeing this Child promised, when he should be born into the world, should be no more than a man like themselves.

Should we place this circumstance on a level with the naming of *Shear-Jashub*, as directed by you, and look on it as nothing out of the common way, it would only tend to perplex and bewilder us the more, and therefore demonstrate the obscurity of the prophet. "A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, whose name shall be called IMMANUEL, but who, notwithstanding, is not IMMANUEL, but a mere man like ourselves." When this prediction came to be fulfilled, and the Virgin actually brought forth her Son, what wonderful phenomena appear? A new star, perhaps a new world, is discovered by the eastern *Magi*, and the hosts of heaven descend to hymn the birth of the Son of Man. The equivocal name given by the prophet

prophet to the Virgin's son, and the festivity of the hosts of paradise, on his being born into our world, naturally lead us to consider this child, as extraordinary, and something more than a man like ourselves. So that if your notion be true, there was a double snare laid, for the entanglement of Christians; the unmeaning, or at least unapplicable name, imposed upon him in prophecy; and the august manner in which he was introduced into the world. Could this latter be consistent with the wisdom of God? Had the former any likeness to the clear and nervous manner of the prophet Mohammed? Surely not. For as I have before observed, he carefully guarded against every expression, that might produce a belief of Jesus Christ's being any more than a man like himself.

But the Trinitarians, or what is the same, Christian idolaters, have a very happy way of preserving the dignity of this prediction, in a perfect consistency with the whole volume of Revelation, in resting satisfied with that explanation given by Paul, *"God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."* This does extremely well for the orthodox, but is wholly incompatible with your absurd, scheme of doctrine.

We consider this apostolical declaration, as proclaiming the fulfilment of that prophecy, and believe that the Virgin's Son was none other, than God incarnated in our own proper nature. And indeed it will be worthy of your sagacity to shew, how God could be said to have been manifested in the flesh of Jesus, if he had indeed no personal Union with Deity; and at the same time how

God manifested in the flesh, could be said to be received up into glory, if their was not a nature united to a divine person, which actually underwent that amazing change; or with what propriety blood could be ascribed to Deity, if flesh and blood had not stood, in personal relation thereunto? I plainly foresee, that, if we give up the doctrine of the TRINITY, and of CHRIST'S DIVINITY, we shall also be obliged to foregoe the Bible itself, as the most incoherent, and absurd of all publications. Notwithstanding if taken in its connection with these blessed doctrines, it is perfectly beautiful; it is a glorious discovery of the mind and will, of all the persons in DEITY, and of all the perfections of JEHOVAH.

But I have not yet done with the sublime Isaiah, seeing that passage in this prophecy, chap. ix. 6. is still more obscure, and more adverse to Mohammedanism, and what you call rational Christianity "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting FATHER, the Prince of Peace." I must beg leave to observe upon this passage, that, if your explanation* be the Socinian sense of it, and if their sense is the genuine mind of the HOLY GHOST, this prophet, who has been so justly admired for his elocution

* In this, as in the former case, these titles may not express what *Christ* is, but what God will manifest himself to be in him, and by him; so that, in the dispensation of the gospel, God, the wise and benevolent author of it, will appear to be a wonderful counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. If this name be supposed to characterize Christ himself, it will by no means favour the common doctrine of the Trinity; because it will make him to be the *Father*, or the first person, and not the *Son*, or the second person. Besides, whatever powers or dignities are to be possessed by Christ, it is sufficiently intimated in this place, that he does not

cution and sublimity, must sink into contempt: nay, be deemed worthy of the severest censure, as a blind leader of the people, one who has given occasion of the stumbling of millions.

If these titles given to Christ are not expressive of what he really is in himself, but what God will manifest himself to be through him; it must follow that the titles themselves, are not proper to CHRIST, but to God only; and consequently that God himself must, properly speaking, be that child born, and that son given; an absurdity never so much as thought on by the Trinitarians, idolatrous as you have represented them to be. They never supposed that the divine nature was changed into flesh and blood; but that this promised seed should be conceived in personal union with the word of God, who has an indubitable right to all the titles following, and so become the child-born, and the son given considered in this relation. They cannot see how their considering the son of God, as the everlasting Father of his church, can have any unhappy influence on the doctrine of the Trinity as you alledge. But they very justly conclude, that if to worship Jesus CHRIST, as the mighty God, is really idolatry, this prophet is very blameable for his manner of speaking, and justly deserves punishment, as an instrument of bringing on their inevitable ruin.

Had he been studious of the good of mankind, would he not have guarded them against idolatry? How easily might he have expressed himself, in some such manner as this? "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, who is in all of not hold them *independent*, and *underived*; since he himself, and all the blessings that he bestows, are said to be *given*, that is, by God; and at the conclusion of the prophecy, in the next verse, it is said, that *the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this*. Famil. illust. pages 29 & 30.

respects only a man like ourselves. He is *not* the wonderful Counsellor, *nor* the mighty God, *nor* the everlasting *Father*, having had no existence prior to his being born into the world; but by him, in the dispensation of the gospel, God the wise and benevolent Author of it, will appear to be a wonderful Counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace, for it is not the child born, but God the Father to whom these titles are applicable². This would have approached near to the clearness of stile used in the Turkish Koran. But to tell us that the Child born, the Son given should be called God with us, when in reality he meant no such thing, is absolute jesuitism; and if your doctrine should eventually prove true, I could never forgive *Isaiab* this egregious blunder, so fatal in its influence, on the concerns of my immortal soul.

Shall we ever find the prophet of Arabia talking in such vague, and unmeaning, not to say ambiguous and equivocal terms? He speaks of a child born, but keeps clear of every appellation, which might lead men to worship Christ, as the mighty God, or the everlasting FATHER, or even to think him more than a man like themselves. From which it is clear to a demonstration, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a much better prophet than *Isaiab*, and of course the Mohammedan, is preferable to the Christian religion.

But Sir, if the CHILD BORN, the SON GIVEN, has indeed a personal right to all the sublime appellations, given him by the prophet, what horred blasphemy must it be, to treat him only as a man, in all respects like ourselves; a being, who

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* This is Dr. Priestley's exposition, Fam. Illust. of the passage.

had no existence till about seventeen hundred years ago? Think, Sir, how terrible the wrath of a blasphemed Redeemer must be, wherever it falls! Is not this the rock that shall grind them, upon whom it falls, to powder.

To return to my subject, and that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth of my proposition may be established: Namely, if your doctrine, that Jesus Christ is but a man like ourselves, be true, *Mohammed* was more clear, more consistent than the prophet *Isaiah*; you will permit me to point out, the remarkable obscurity of his fortieth chapter.

First he prophesies in verse 3, of John the Baptist, CHRIST's forerunner, in these very remarkable words, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a path for our God." Again, addressing Zion in verses 10, 11, he says, "behold the LORD God will come, with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, shall gently lead those that are with young."

Here the person before whom the voice was to cry is expressly called **JEHOVAH—OUR GOD**—and the **LORD GOD**. Yet this advent of the **LORD GOD**, is expressly applied to **JESUS CHRIST**, and John his forerunner in *Mat. iii.* and *Luke iii. 4.* And Jesus assumes the office and character of Shepherd, by the prophet ascribed to the **LORD GOD**, whose coming was promised, and before whom John was to prepare a way in the wilderness.

The following august description of this blessed Shepherd, who was to follow *John*, serves still to make

make the matter more difficult; as nobody could suppose the prophet describing a mere creature, who has not existed eighteen hundred years. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand: and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, &c. &c." It would seem that the prophet had here exhausted the funds of eloquence, in order to set forth the greatness and grandeur of that Being who is the subject of his prophesy. But, if after all, he is no more than a mere creature, this must argue an entire want of judgment in the writer, or an impious design to lead us into idolatry, by worshipping JESUS CHRIST as the God of Zion. And yet if this was the prophet's design, the LORD JESUS actually connives at it, and even confirms it by applying his words to himself, Rev. xxii. 12.

But what renders the prophecy still more ambiguous and obscure, is the cry which this voice was sent to publish, "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof, as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the WORD of our God shall stand forever."—One would suppose that his leading design, in this passage, was to caution people, against the folly of trusting in a Saviour, who is but a mere man like ourselves, seeing that all flesh is grass, and the most goodly humanity, abstractly considered, is but as the flower of the field—therefore that none may warrantably trust in any, who has not a personal claim to that divine character, the WORD of the LORD, or our God.

Surely no man but a rational Dissenter could suppose, that all this magnificence of stile was used, merely, to set forth a man in all respects like ourselves; a man who has not any, the most distant title to personal Deity. No wonder therefore if Christians were so early seduced into idolatry, and that the well-instructed Disciples of Mohammed, have continued so stedfast in the faith, that Jesus Christ is but a man like themselves, and that there is *One* God, in *One* person only, and that Mohammed is his prophet. I would therefore, for my own part when I come to change my sentiments, much rather embrace the religion of the Turks, respecting its fundamental doctrine, than that of the rational Dissenters, or the sentiments of the Socinians.

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

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LETTER XVI.

REVEREND SIR,

WHAT has been said in the former letters, may serve as a specimen of the confused language of prophecy, on supposition that your doctrine is true. I might add many more instances of equal ambiguity, but shall proceed to shew, that if JESUS CHRIST be not the adorable God—man, he must have borne the most sacrilegious character, that ever existed, and, must of necessity have been the greatest of all impostors; which is a thought so tremendous, that I scarcely know how to express it. But I trust, the character of my only Redeemer shall stand for ever unimpeached, whatever should become of Mohammedans, or Socinians, or even of the Trinitarians themselves. Yet this shocking consequence naturally results from rational religion, as it is very falsely called.

In prosecuting this affecting subject, I shall shew, that, if Jesus Christ is but a man in all respects like ourselves, he has most certainly robbed the Almighty of his glory, both in the manner in which he wrought his miracles—and in his application of old testament oracles to himself, though they could not possibly be applicable to any person, who is not truly and properly GOD.

The manner of working his miracles shall be the object of my present attention, and I hope you will honour my remarks upon it with yours in the most serious manner. I do not mean to solicit your public notice. No, Sir; perhaps you do not choose to reply to an ignoble correspondent. All I mean is to request your candid perusal.

sal in private, seeing I have no pretensions to nobility.

The matter will begin with Mat. viii. 3, 4. "And behold their came a Leper and worshiped him, saying, LORD, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." I lay no stress at all on the word worshipped, it might, for any thing I know, intend no more, "than a fine scrape and bow," but what I principally remark is, the manner of this same Leper's address. LORD, if thou wilt, &c. He does not say "if God will," thou canst make me clean.—Not; if God will he can give thee power to make me clean. What thoughts soever the Pharisees might have of Jesus, as but a man like themselves, it is very plain, that this poor Leper considered him as the LORD of diseases, who, could say to this, go and it goeth, and to that, come and it cometh, or he would certainly have addressed him in a different manner.

What is more remarkable still, our Lord really encourages his error, and confirms his idolatrous belief, by answering the supplicant in his own form of speech, "I will be thou clean." Who was he, that should take upon him to make people clean, if he was but a man like ourselves? Of all the men like ourselves, whom God ever raised up as prophets, we read but of one who attempted a miracle in his own name, and he severely smarted for his presumption.* I mean

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* If, to be blunt, the edge of this reasoning, it be replied, Elisha wrought many miracles without referring to any power higher than that which dwelt in himself, notwithstanding all were wrought by the power of the most high God; such as increasing the widow's oil, giving a child to the Shunamite, sending a messenger to Naaman, directing him to go and wash in Jordan, &c. it will be farther answered. To do justice to a personal character, we ought carefully to attend to every part

Moses the man, the friend of God, who, instead of sanctifying the name of the Lord at the waters of strife, struck the rock in his own name, saying,

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part of his particular history, and not pick out detached pieces, to the injury of the whole. If the history of Elisha is closely examined, and taken in its proper connection, it will appear, that God only was glorified in those miracles by him performed.

His entrance upon the prophetic office, was evidently a display of Divine power, by which alone a double portion of the spirit of Elijah rested upon his servant Elisha. He had not power to cross the river Jordan, till he invoked the Lord God of his master, by whose power he divided the mighty waters. This, were there no more instances on record, is sufficient to shew, that all his subsequent works were wrought by the same ineffable power of Deity, and consequently in the same name by which he began to work his miracles. But he gave a Son to the Shunamite, on which occasion we are not told that he called on the name of the Lord; and therefore this instance is in some measure parallel with Christ's working of miracles without calling upon the name of God.

He did give the Shunamite a Son, but it does not appear, that he called not on the name of God on the occasion; but if he did, the very history of that Child, sheweth that he wrought not this miracle without a Divine power supernaturally made manifest. Take the history together, and let the latter part explain the former; as it cannot be supposed that Elisha had less power to work miracles at the latter end, than at the beginning; and we shall see that he did not do even this without an appeal to the divine name.

The Shunamite visited him at mount Carmel, 2 Kings, ch. iv. He saw the anguish of her soul, but he could not guess at the cause, because the Lord had hid it from him, till the woman disclosed the fatal event. Which done, he sent Gehazi, his servant, with very positive instructions for his procedure, in raising the child to life; but all in vain, for "there was neither voice nor hearing, and the child did not awake." When he himself arrived, he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon the child's eyes, his hands upon the child's hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and his flesh waxed warm. Now all this was accompanied with prayer to God, that the child's spirit might return to him again. From hence it is plain, the prophet wrought his miracles in such a manner,

"ye rebels, shall we bring water out of the rock for you?" The waters indeed followed the stroke, because GOD would support the honour of his prophet, even when he sinned; and took another method of punishing his rashness, namely, by shutting him out of the earthly Canaan.

Jesus refers to none greater than himself, but expressly says, "I WILL," not my Father willeth, or by the permission of God, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy departed from him. Not only so, but he goes on in an uninterrupted succession of marvellous cures, without once mentioning the name of the FATHER, yet is acknowledged by an audible voice from Heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him. Does not this lead us to suppose, that the FATHER approved of his working miracles in his own name? Especially, when it is considered that the Apostles did not work any miracles at all in the name of the FATHER, but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly God would not thus have given his glory to another, if indeed he had been another, seeing he had so peremptorily declared the contrary. And surely the glory of working miracles in his own name is proper only to DEITY. Therefore, GOD must either have given this glory to CHRIST, who was another; or CHRIST must have usurped it;

as that God should have the honour of them all. But Jesus wrought his, so as the glory arising from them redounded to himself, and seldom mentioned the name of the Father in them. How different was the prophet's conduct from Christ's, when he raised the widow's son of Nain, by only saying, "Young man, I say unto thee, *arise*." Whereas Elijah, or Elisha, would in such a case have prayed unto the LORD, and said, O LORD, MY GOD, I pray thee, let this young man's soul come into him again. 1 Kings xvii. 12.

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otherwise he must absolutely be the true and eternal God, I mean in the Unity of the DIVINE ESSENCE.

Now if he was but a man like ourselves, there was something *inhumane*, as well as impious, in the manner in which CHRIST sent the Leper away, as from what had passed, he must needs go away under a delusion; firmly believing, that, the man Jesus had performed this cure, by his own personal power and authority; which, according to your notions, must have been *downright idolatry*. So that the very cure he had obtained, might, from the manner of it, have become the occasion of his perdition, by leading him to honour the SON, as much as he honoured the FATHER.

This is the true conduct of Jesus according to your plan of doctrine. But it is as distant from the Heavenly, and compassionate conduct of the Redeemer whom I adore, as light is from darkness, or Heaven from hell. *Our Jesus* being the blessed *Immanuel*, had a right to assume every divine honour, and could not be charged with robbing God, though he actually made himself equal with the FATHER. But your Jesus, being only a man like yourselves, may very justly be charged with sacrilegious robbery, on applying to himself any of the prerogatives of GOD THE FATHER.

The instance of healing the Centurion's servant is equally remarkable for the strange and unaccountable manner in which it was performed. "LORD, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" why not, if he was but a man like himself? "But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," what, by the word of one who is but a man like ourselves? "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say unto this go, and he goeth; and to another come, and he

he cometh; and to my servant do this, and he doth it," plainly intimating that he considered Jesus as having the same power over diseases, as he himself had over his soldiers. At the word of command to call them, or to send them away; and in this, lay the greatness of his faith, so justly celebrated by the Heavenly prophet. Yet Jesus was so far from attempting to convince him of his error, that he even confirms him in it: by applauding his faith, and then granting his request, without any reference made to an influence superior to his own volition. Certainly if Jesus was but a mere man, possessed only of a delegated power, acting in every respect in a subordinate capacity, he was culpable in not calling upon that superior name, in which he performed all his operations. His disciples, how absurd soever in other respects, maintained a consistency in this part of their character; for although they wrought many miracles, they did none but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. In this, they did not ascribe to the power of the Father *only*, the miracles which they wrought, but to his holy child Jesus: and they did not, like him, leave room to suppose, that they performed miracles by their own personal authority. Mohammed would have told the people in such a case, that he wrought, *only by the permission of God*; as he indeed tells us was the case with Jesus; which also seems to be the sense of the virtuous Socinian doctors.

The same chapter furnisheth us with three other instances of his miraculous power; in healing Peter's wife's mother of a fever—rebuking the wind and sea, as if he had been their Maker and Governor—casting legions of devils out of the demoniac, and permitting them to enter into the

the herd of swine. We may well say, what manner of man is this, the touch of whose hand makes the Leper clean, and banishes the most malignant fever? Who at pleasure controls the boisterous wind, and calms the tempestuous ocean. But when we follow the thread of the story a little farther, we must be shocked with horror, at hearing him give permission to devils, to drown and destroy the swine belonging to the neighbouring farmers. Might we not well ask him, as the Jews did on another occasion, "by what authority dost thou these things?"

You say, Sir, that Jesus was commissioned by God. But have you duly considered the propriety of your assertion? Can it ever be, that God should give a commission to him to destroy the people's cattle without some cause on their own part? Or do you think, that drowning the swine was the readiest way to convince them of the truth of his doctrine? But every difficulty vanisheth, when we consider him as the blessed GOD-MAN, whose are the cattle on a thousand hills; and reflect, that those Gergesenes carried on an illicit traffic with the Gentile nations. Breeding swine for the use of the Heathens, though forbidden their own use by the national law; wherein swine's flesh was held an abomination. I say, when these things are considered, every part of the Redeemer's conduct is not only justifiable, but perfectly consistent with his legislative rectitude and authority: but he could never be justified, on supposition, that he was but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves. Neither would it give us a favourable idea of the benevolence of his disposition, nor even of his moral rectitude and virtue.

The account we have Mat. ix. Mark v. and Luke viii. of his healing the woman with the bloody issue, exhibits something very dark and perplexing; as it manifestly appears upon the face of the text, that Jesus considered himself, and the evangelist also considered him as the source of the miracle, exclusive of all superior influence. Mark says, that Jesus knowing in himself that virtue was *gone out of him*, turned about, &c. whereas he ought to have said, that virtue was gone out from God, by him as the instrument, according to you. But what must astonish every rational Christian, is, Jesus himself confirms the evangelist's testimony, Luke viii. 45. *Jesus said somebody hath touched me: for VIRTUE IS GONE OUT OF ME.*" Now if he wrought no miracles, but by the permission of the Father, as Mohammed says, or performed all his works by the power of the Father, as you would have us to believe, was he not shamefully wanting in zeal for God, to talk in this strain, "virtue is *gone out of ME?*" What virtue, I pray you, should go out of one, who is in all respects but a man like ourselves? If there is but ONE GOD, in ONE PERSON, the FATHER *only*, and if JESUS CHRIST was a teacher sent from him; was it not his business, to lead the people to the FATHER ONLY, instead of leading them to himself? But instead of that, he works miracles, and does not so much as mention the name of the Father in them; yea even tells the people, that the virtue by which those miracles were effected, came entirely out of himself, as its source. Indeed, Sir, it will be very difficult to clear the character of JESUS from the charge, of *robbing the DEITY*, on supposition, that he is no more than a man like ourselves.

But

But the difficulty disappears, when we consider holy Jesus as the divine Immanuel; as in reality, God manifested in the flesh; for then all this is perfectly becoming him, as the seat of virtue, and source of healing. There needed not a higher spring of felicity to man, nor a stronger arm to finish either temporal or eternal salvation.—

I beg, that if Jesus be only a man like ourselves, and yet must be embraced as our only Lord and Saviour, that his character may stand fair and unimpeachable, otherwise we shall be obliged to prefer the Mohammedan to the Christian religion.

The above instances may serve as a specimen of the miracles of Jesus; more are ready whenever the cause of religion shall appear to require them; at present, I shall only add, that, of all the miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth, I recollect only one, in which the FATHER is at all invoked. This singular instance was, when standing by the grave of Lazarus of Bethany, he thus addressed the Father, “Father I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by, I said, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”

This is understood as purposely done, to manifest his subordinacy as man, and Mediator; seeing, that if all his works had been performed, without any mention of the FATHER, the whole system of miracles would have contributed nothing to support the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity, how much soever those miracles might have tended to set forth his own eternal power and Godhead. And even here, it is remarkable, that his address does not consist of prayer, but of thanksgiving; nor does it manifest any subordinacy but in the human nature.

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To keep clear of every dead sin which might spoil our ointment, I would observe that, I am aware, you will alledge in Christ's defence, that he made a general profession upon more occasions than one, of subordinacy to the Father, and of his shewing good works from the Father, as John x. 32. But then it will be answered, why did he not upon all occasions, on which he exerted a miraculous power bear this testimony, that the people might not be misled into a wrong notion of his person and authority? The Leper, the Centurion, the woman with the bloody issue, were sent away without any such information, or any caution against believing in him as the source of healing. Consequently this very profession serves, only to embarrass his character the more; Leads us to consider his conduct in the following light. He knew all along, that he wrought no works but by the power of the Father; and on particular occasions openly confesses it; yet the far greater part of his works were performed without any visible reference had to the Father; and the subjects upon whom he exercised his miraculous power, were, for the most part left to conclude, that they were cured merely by the personal authority of the immediate operator; whereas a few words fitly spoken by him would

* Should it be replied, Why did he not, upon all occasions, testify his proper Deity, instead of frequently professing his subordinacy to the Father? It will be answered, that in publishing the doctrine of truth, there was no necessity for it; it being a matter perfectly indifferent, whether that doctrine is published immediately by God himself, or mediately by a commissioned instrument, seeing it is in both cases equally authentic. But when he performs works peculiar to Deity, without appealing to any superior power, we can never be damaged, surely, for believing that he hath proper Godhead personally appertaining to him.

have

have convinced them of the contrary. So that this, instead of clearing him from the charge of robbing the Deity, only serves to confirm it.

But every cloud disperseth, every difficulty vaniseth, when we consider him as, according to the scriptures, acting in a twofold capacity becoming his name Immanuel. As Man, and Mediator, acting in subordination to, and by the authority of the FATHER: and as a divine person dwelling in the flesh, at one with the Father, acting in his own name, and by his own personal authority. And I think, without considering him in this light, it is morally impossible to clear him from the charge of duplicity, and of prophane-ly robbing the Deity.

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

L E T.

LETTER XVII.

REVEREND SIR,

IT is now time to come to CHRIST's application of Old Testament prophecies to himself, and to treat of his usual manner, of confounding himself with DEITY, in which, it shall be left to you to determine, whether such conduct can be justified by the laws of piety, or even by those of sober intelligence, on supposition always, that your plan of doctrine be genuine gospel. You seem to be apprehensive of some difficulty, arising from this consideration, from the great pains you have taken in your familiar illustration, to explain away some of those passages of scripture, which bear hardest upon your irrational scheme. This, Sir, demonstrates the obscurity of the scriptures, and may in some measure assist me, in my determination, whether the religion of JESUS, according to your plan of doctrine, or the Mohammedan religion shall be adopted.

Searching the hearts of the children of men is claimed by the MOST HIGH as his own prerogative, Jer xvii. 10. I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins." This has been ascribed to him by his church in all ages, as might be shewn in numberless instances. And would we not from hence be led to suppose, that none besides the MOST HIGH God, could pretend to search the heart, and try the reins of the sons of men. Indeed the scriptures of the Old Testament give all possible encouragement to this notion; for Solomon, in his prayer at the consecration of the temple, 2. Chron. vi. 30. says, "THOU ONLY knowest the hearts of the children of men." If I am not mistaken,
that

that which is peculiar to GOD ONLY, as searching the heart, is here said to be, must in its own nature be incommunicable: for were it communicable to a creature, it could not be peculiar to GOD *himself*. Were it possible that God should communicate the power and prerogative of searching the heart, and trying the reigns of the sons of men, to a mere creature, even to a man like ourselves, as you alledge, it could with no propriety be said of him, that *he only* searcheth the heart; seeing, another besides him, actually knoweth the heart, and searcheth the reins of the children of men.

A teacher sent from God, must necessarily be considered, as one that knows the Divine mind, especially in every thing relative to his own personal mission; one that will, on all occasions, preserve the most awful distance between himself and his Maker; for this seems to be essential to true piety, which, you know, cannot be separated from the character of a good man. We cannot therefore suppose, that Jesus was ignorant of Solomon's confession of the MOST HIGH GOD, as the *only* searcher of hearts. His professed design in coming into the world was to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to destroy their testimony. We cannot therefore but wonder, he should suffer his evangelists to ascribe that perfection to himself, in flat contradiction to the testimony borne by Solomon. I say contradiction, on supposition that your doctrine were true. They tell us, that Jesus saw the thoughts of the Jewish cavillers: that he needed not that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man. Surely this was to all intents and purposes confounding him with that God, *who only* knoweth the hearts of the children of men.

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But what must we think, when we find **JESUS CHRIST** applying Solomon's confession to himself in person? He gives us all possible reason to believe, that he is essentially that very being, whom Solomon address'd on that occasion. Devout Solomon says, "THOU ONLY knowest the hearts of the children of men." **JESUS** replies, *Rev. ii. 23.* I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." He even seems to wish this declaration to be published abroad by his heralds as the true doctrine of the gospel; for he says, "and all the churches shall know, that I AM HE that searcheth the reins and hearts." If therefore but a mere man like ourselves, he was guilty of the highest presumption, and took the most likely way possible to lead us into idolatry. For so long as we believe him to be the searcher of hearts, and trier of the reins of men, we are under an unavoidable necessity of worshipping him, with the same divine honours which we ascribe to the **FATHER**. And should we be damned for so doing, must not our ruin be laid to his charge, who, by ascribing divine honours to himself, instead of maintaining that lowly distance becoming a creature, has been the occasion of it?

I do not wonder, that people of your persuasion are so much offended with the revelation of John the divine, as to wish it cut off from the sacred Canon, it is so extremely adverse to your scheme of irrational religion; which, if the scriptures be true, must be the absurdest system of enthusiasm, to be met with amongst modern *Fanatics*. One caution, however, I would beg leave to give those **ENTHUSIASTS**, who are so zealous to get rid of this part of holy scripture; and that is, well to consider a certain passage in it, *Rev. xxii. 18, 19.* "For I testify unto every man, that heareth the
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the prophesy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and the things which are written in this book". If there is but a bare possibility of the Revelation being divinely given, and if its sacred contents are guarded in such a manner, that even to add to, or diminish from them shall be punished with the severest penalty, will it not be very dangerous to attempt expunging of the whole?

After all, if it should appear at his second coming, that our Jesus is none other than the ANCIENT OF DAYS, GOD over all blessed forevermore incarnated in the flesh, what a plight must they be in, who are now mad with enthusiastic zeal, against the doctrine of his proper DEITY, as ONE with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST? These things certainly merit our most serious consideration, as our GOD is not to be trifled with.

Was this the only instance of his applying to himself those parts of Old Testament prophecy, which undoubtedly have the supreme GOD for their object, it might be passed over as a peculiar instance, in which it is supposed, the sacred penman was mistaken. But we find it to be his constant practice, as well as that of his apostles, and must therefore conclude, that either your doctrine is blasphemous enthusiasm, or he himself an arrant impostor: as there does not to me appear to be any medium.

That in Isaiah lxi. is evidently referable only to the supreme GOD, from what is said in verse 8.

" For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery

for burnt offering, and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them." If the speaker can at all be known by his stile, surely JEHOVAH is the speaker here; yet the same august person condescends to an humbler, even a subordinate capacity, and in the beginning of the chapter speaks of himself in the station of a servant, and sets forth the divinity of his mission as such. "The spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because he hath anointed me, &c. Here then is a servant, who calls himself JEHOVAH, and speaks, as if he were the supreme God, and Lawgiver to his people. Yet Jesus, who, you say, is but a man like ourselves, in Luke iv. applies the whole of this to himself: for, after quoting this passage from Isaiah, he said, "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your eyes." By which he must mean to persuade his audience, that he himself was the identical person there speaking in the spirit of prophecy.

The person whom the prophet represented, assumes the name and character of the LORD, or JEHOVAH; by which name God only is known in Jacob: but Jesus in effect tells the people that he was that person, "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your eyes." I hate robbery, says he in the prophecy, but the contrary appears in the application of it to himself, on supposition that he is but a mere man like ourselves. "I love judgment;" but how does this appear, if he assumes divine titles, and prerogatives, when in reality he is not a divine person? "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them;" from whence one would, at first view, be apt to conceive him to be an everlasting Being; or how should his covenant stand? Moreover that he had an essential personal right to make a covenant with his people.

What

What should we think is the design of a mere man, if we heard him ascribing to himself the titles of the supreme God, and, at the same time, avowing himself to be the faithful and true witness? Must we not consider him as an impostor, and his doctrine worthy to be treated with the greatest contempt? It will be in vain to alledge in his excuse, that the divinity of his mission warranted his assumption of those appellations, seeing such warrants, and such practices resulting from them, are wholly unknown among men. The commission of a prince will authorise his ambassador, to speak in the name of his master, but will never warrant his assuming his master's name, and titles of honour. How would their high mightinesses, the States of Holland look upon *Sir Joseph York*, were he to say to them, "I am King George III. defender of the faith, &c." Would they not conclude, that he was either a traitor, or a madman? If he speaks only in the name of his master, they may understand his address; but if he should say, I and KING GEORGE are one: or he that hath seen me hath seen KING GEORGE, they would certainly be at a loss to guess his meaning. Even so, if Jesus had barely said, "the LORD loveth judgment, &c." the people might have known his meaning. But when he says, "I JEHOVAH love judgment, and hate robbery, &c." No man can think that he means to represent himself, as no more than a mere creature. So that at all events, if to worship him as God in our nature be idolatry, he himself has given occasion to our error, therefore deserves the whole blame of our destruction, if we should indeed be damned for believing in him as such. These considerations make greatly

for the prophet *Mohammed*, who never confounded himself with DEITY; never professed himself to be more than a mere man, inspired not by the HOLY GHOST, but by the angel Gabriel; consequently that his religion is rather to be chosen, than the enthusiasm of Socinians and rational Dissenters.

But the answer which Jesus gave to John's disciples, when sent to him with a very peremptory message, demanding a categorical answer, will further tend to prove our position, and to give the ascendancy to Mohammed the prophet, as in all respects more tender of the divine character and perfections. Mat. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6. *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

This answer was, in effect the same, as if he had said, "go your way and tell John, that you have seen the xxxvth chap. of Isaiah fulfilled in my ministry;" for this answer is nothing short of a clear declaration, of the fulfilment of that prediction, verses 4, 5, 6. Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, &c. So says the prophet. And Jesus says, go ye and tell John, that all these things are come to pass. Now as it was never expected,
that

that these things should come to pass, till God came with vengeance, and our God with a recompence to save us: must not the answer given by Jesus, naturally lead *John* and his *Disciples* to conclude, that their God was actually thus come, seeing every sign of his coming was made manifest?

Here is no care taken either by the prophet, or by Jesus himself, to guard the people against paying supreme honour to that person, in whom such mighty works did shew forth themselves. But on the contrary, they both concur, in giving us room to believe, that he was none other than God manifested in the flesh. Wherefore if it be idolatry to worship JESUS CHRIST, with the same worship which we pay to the FATHER, the blame lies not with us, but with himself, and the penmen of the scriptures. That he even intended to be considered as God in the human nature, is apparent from the conclusion of his answer, "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

It was not opening of blind eyes, unstopping of deaf ears, &c. which were a stumbling to the Jews: but the grand offence was, "he being a man made himself God." And surely they were in the right, seeing no man could possibly have understood him, to intend otherwise, without plainly inverting his language. Had he bid *John's* disciples to tell their master what they saw, and at the same time to caution him against considering him as a DIVINE PERSON, there would have been a propriety in his conduct, and he had not been accessory to the idolatry of his disciples, which idolatry shall be the subject of my next.

Mean while I would observe, that if there really are THREE, that bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST; and if JESUS CHRIST is none other than the divine WORD made flesh, and who dwelt among us; then his conduct is perfectly consistent; he stands acquitted of sacrilegiously robbing the ALMIGHTY, which he never can be, if your doctrine be true. I do not pretend to say, whether John's testimony be an interpolation or not, as I never saw the identical copy, that may be called the original, I mean that which was in the apostles hand-writing. And this I deem necessary, before I shall believe those ENTHUSIASTS who affirm, its not having been in the original. I verily think none but an enthusiast, will be daring enough to make this assertion, without having previously examined that identical original copy. Therefore from your bold affirmation of its being interpolated, I should suppose, that you have been favoured with that privilege.

Once more we must repeat our observation, in favour of *Mohammed*, that in no place of his *Koran*, does he assume any divine title, or make use of language calculated to make his followers consider him, as any other than a man, whom GOD had honoured as a reformer of religion. Never once in any sense confounds himself with GOD, having the most perfect abhorrence of that idolatry, which exalts a creature to an equality with GOD the FATHER. I conclude therefore, that if JESUS CHRIST be but a mere man like ourselves; one who has no personal title to divine worship, we had better at once reject the Bible, as an abstruse book, stuffed with incoherence, ambiguity, and equivocation; and

and receive the *Koran*, as the mind of God, a book which sets the doctrine of God and CHRIST in a more consistent, clear, and intelligible point of view, if your religion be indeed the truly Christian system,

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER

LETTER XVIII.

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING in my last shewn, that if your doctrine be true, JESUS CHRIST must have been one of the most unintelligible, not to say the most dangerous, of all preachers; I shall attempt in this, farther to demonstrate the proposition, by shewing the unhappy influence which his doctrine produced upon his immediate followers, who were to all intents and purposes as erroneous as the rest of the Trinitarians. I am the more encouraged to this, from the visible difficulty which even your adventurous pen laboured under, in endeavouring to find out their meaning, which nevertheless, to this hour, lies as deeply concealed as ever.

Although I am like yourself, one of those distinguished geniuses who love to strike out from the beaten path, as we have both abundantly shewn in former lucubrations; I shall find myself now under a necessity of following you from page to page, and from sentence to sentence, after the manner of polemic writers, or as Achilles followed the Trojan hero round the walls of the city.

You, Sir, with all your high intelligence, seem to be aware of the difficulty of explaining many passages of the apostolic writings, and are therefore obliged to substitute a bold assertion, in place of a rational interpretation, a method generally adopted by all enthusiasts. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, styles him (Christ) say you, "the author and finisher of faith." Which title is attributed to JESUS, with respect to the state of glory and universal dominion, to which he is exalted by the FATHER*." It may be so, Doctor.

But

* Fam. Illust. p. 25.

But certainly, it is in the highest degree improper. Either JESUS is not, or he is the author and finisher of faith. If he is not, we should not expect to hear him declared such, by the SPIRIT of truth. If he is the author of faith, it will follow, that he is GOD as well as Man: seeing faith is in every sense, not only the gift of GOD, but of his operation. Now if faith is the gift of GOD, and of his operation, how absurd is it to assert, that JESUS CHRIST is the Author and Finisher of faith: seeing he is but “ a man in all respects like ourselves?” Or, to gratify curiosity a little, take the argument in the following order; if faith is only by the gift and operation of GOD, and if JESUS CHRIST be really its author and finisher, how, in the name of common sense, is it possible, that he should be *no more than a man like ourselves?*

Is it not clear to every rational reader, that if the apostles, in one passage of their writings, tell us, that faith is the gift of GOD; of the operation of GOD, &c. and in another, ascribe faith to JESUS as its author and finisher; their intent is, if they knew their own meaning, to make us believe, that JESUS CHRIST actually is GOD over all, blessed for evermore.

But enthusiasts and bigots to party opinions, will swallow any absurdity without attempting to digest it. If the apostles were then divinely inspired, and really knew their own meaning, will not this instance, from their writings, in some measure justify our worship of JESUS, in union with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, as the TRUE GOD and eternal life? If they knew not their own meaning, they were very unfit persons for being the founders of the Christian Religion.

Take a view of the matter according to your notions, Sir, and then judge of its propriety.

Faith

Faith is the gift of GOD, and of the operation of GOD; Jesus is the author and finisher of faith, and yet he is no more GOD than we ourselves are. Or thus, "Jesus is the author and finisher of faith; yet is not faith either of his operation or his gift." What man of sound understanding, would not wish to keep clear of a system of enthusiasm so big with absurdity, even when it imposeth itself upon mankind, as rational religion? It puts me in mind of the Ass in masquerade in the fable. The lion's skin could not conceal the imposition. But to dismiss this passage, I must say, that if the apostles knew JESUS CHRIST to be no more than a man like ourselves, they were exceedingly blameable for expressing themselves in language so obscure and equivocal, no such instance of ambiguity being found with the prophet of Arabia, when speaking of GOD, or of CHRIST JESUS.

Your long quotation from the book of the Revelation, will very little mend the matter, seeing it implies an unjust insinuation, as if the Trinitarians denied Jesus to sustain any subordinate character. On the contrary, it has been their constant practice to set him forth as Man and Mediator, as acting in all respects in subordination to the FATHER. But they distinguish between his divine person, abstracted from his humanity, as existing in the Unity of the Godhead; and his human nature as existing in Union with that DIVINE PERSON. They can therefore perfectly, and in the most rational manner, reconcile his supremacy as GOD-MAN with his subordinacy, as Man and Mediator: whilst enthusiasts of every name confound themselves, by denying the one or the other of these characters, so essential to the person of our Redeemer. I sincerely wish, that our modern

dern pretenders to superior reason, were favoured with a larger measure of common sense.

But notwithstanding this subordination, as you observe, he says (and the saying must be very strange indeed) I am the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the ALMIGHTY. You say, indeed, " that these high titles are attributed to Jesus " But nothing can be plainer, Sir, than that he attributes them to himself, which still must add to the difficulty. That Jesus is a teacher sent from God, to teach the worship of the FATHER only, and yet declares of himself, that he is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the *beginning* and the *ending*, which was, and which is to come, the *Almighty*; is a consideration that must puzzle every person of common understanding, who has not attained the address of leaping over the plainest testimony. Consequently, Sir, it makes greatly for the point I have in view, namely, to shew the obscurity and ambiguity of scripture language, on supposition, that the Socinian scheme is the true gospel of GOD OUR SAVIOUR.

To soften that stubborn word, ALMIGHTY, you have critically observed, that it signifies *Ruler over all*. A notable discovery, indeed! a discovery becoming a comprehensive genius; especially when it is considered, that to be *ruler over all*, requires a person to be *mighty over all*. For if he is not *mighty over all*, how should he be *ruler over all*? How can it be supposed, that he can rule those beings over whom he has no power? And if he is *mighty over all*, after all this circumlocution, the word reverts to its usually accepted sense, where I shall for the present leave it, and observe, that if he is mighty over all in any sense, in that same sense, there is none mighty over him; or to use
your

your own phrase. If he is *ruler over all*, it would seem, that there is none who rules over him, in that sense in which he is said to be RULER. After all, I think, in your exculpation of Jesus from the charge of ambition, and of robbing the DEITY, you might have found a more happy interpretation of the word ALMIGHTY, than that of RULER OVER ALL. That, you know, is proper only to the great God; and your ascribing it to the little God, *Jesus Christ* *, tends to confirm us in our idolatry.

But supposing we could, by the depth of reason, make it appear, that the word ALMIGHTY means no more, than the sounding word CANDOUR does with rational Dissenters, that is, nothing at all; we shall still find ourselves woefully perplexed by the other parts of the Redeemer's claim.

Admitting that you could take his omnipotence from him, what will you make of his being the *beginning* and the *ending*, which was, and which is to come? Which was. How long? Since the beginning of the Gospel.—Who told you so? Why, are not the words “of the Gospel,” inserted in the text? If the beginning is mentioned without any expletive, are we not under a necessity of understanding thereby, the beginning of Being or Existence; or, as it is otherwise expressed, the beginning of the creation of God? *Which was* since his Being *set up*. This was from everlasting. Therefore I cannot say, though you can, when

* Great God—A phrase familiar to the lips of Arians and Socinians, who, if they mean any thing at all by it, and allow Jesus Christ in any sense nominally, or by vocation, or otherwise to be God, must necessarily account him to be but the little God.

Jesus began to exist : because, in my view, he either existed from everlasting, or he does not now exist as the Saviour of sinners. There was, indeed, a man called Jesus, appeared about 1740 years ago, who made great pretensions to a divine mission. But what is that to me ? I am not obliged to believe every one who comes with such pretensions. Besides, if he is not truly and properly God, I have much better reason to believe in *Mohammed* than in him ; seeing *Mohammed* never encroached upon the province of the Almighty, never assumed names which might not be given to a mere man like ourselves. I never can, therefore, commit the keeping of my soul, and its everlasting concerns, into the hands of one, the beginning of whose existence is uncertain ; consequently the Jesus you talk of can be no Saviour for me. This leads me to take notice of the wisdom of the rationals, who knowing that they have only a poor impotent man for their Saviour, take care not to overload him, therefore take it upon themselves to finish transgression, and make an end of sin ; to propitiate the DEITY, and work out their own salvation, under his common influences or assistance.

But, Sir, if JESUS be what I with my whole heart believe he is ; he had a just, a personal right, to every part of this assumption. And to tell you the truth, if he is not the blessed IMMANUEL, God manifested in our nature, I would as soon believe in Dr. Prietley, or the pope of Rome, or Mohammed, as the saviour of mankind, as in him. This, Sir, I give you leave to publish at large, as the sentiments of the absurd Sh—r, and if you please, for this you may write me down Heretic.

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To return now to my subject after so long a wander, a thing which, you know from former correspondence, I am in some measure subject unto; give me leave to note that quotation of yours from Heb. i. 6*. *When God bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, let all the angels of God worship him.* The use of the word worship in other passages, and on other occasions, is not the object of my present enquiry, but the certainty of its ambiguity, according to your sense of it. As to the Jews having no expectation of any other person than a man for their Messiah, as you say they had, will admit of a doubt, seeing Dr. Watts, in his glory of Christ as GOD-MAN, has clearly shewed the contrary. Nor is the remark concerning Abraham's worshipping of the angels altogether to the purpose, seeing whatever he might think of Two of them, it is clear, that to the Third, he paid supreme adoration, and intreated him as the MOST HIGH GOD.

If Paul had said, let all the angels of God honour him as a man whom God hath sent, we should have comprehended his meaning, and steered clear of that Christian idolatry into which we have fallen. But to be told, that all the angels of God must worship him, yet we ourselves must not pay him divine adoration, tends to perplex us with uncertainty. But this passage is clogged with another absurdity, namely, ascribing the name *first begotten* to JESUS CHRIT, as if he had been the FIRST BORN of every creature, and had an actual existence prior to his incarnation; which you are pleased to deny. So then the matter may be thus stated. JESUS is the first begotten, yet he was not begotten till four thousand years after millions of millions of angels and men were created,

* Famil. Illust. 27.

created, and is not now 1800 years of age; whereas Adam is much above 5000. The angels of God must worship him, and yet they must not worship him. All men must honour the SON, even as they honour the FATHER; and yet if any man ascribe the same honour to the SON which is due to the FATHER, he shall be deemed an Idolator. Can that, Sir, be Scripture, the word of the living God, which is big with such uncertainty? Thus beclouded with obscurity, that seventeen hundred years are now elapsed, and its meaning is still doubtful? Still a doubt, whether Christ is to be worshipped as God, or honoured only as a good man and a martyr.

From these remarks it is pretty clear, that your superior reason is an *ignis fatuus*, which bewilders you, and leads you into difficulties inextricable: whilst a consistent Trinitarian, with all his supposed absurdity, preserves the scriptures of truth in their native harmony, beauty, and glory, as the word of that God, who is of one mind for ever and ever. I scruple not therefore to assert, and it is not difficult to prove, that consistent Trinitarians are the truly rational Christians; and that the Socinians themselves are the absurd enthusiasts of our generation. But more of this in my concluding Letter. I shall trouble you with nothing farther this post, than a remark or two on that passage, Col. ii. 9. In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The propriety of which seems to have struck you so agreeably, if your words be indeed expressive of your meaning*.

“ This is a very proper expression, being strictly and literally true, though Christ himself was a mere man, since the wisdom and power of the

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* Fam. Illust. 22.

One true GOD, the FATHER, were manifested in, and acted by him."

So then, Doctor, you will go on to deal in mysteries, after all the salutary instructions you have received from so many different quarters. "A very proper expression; strictly and literally true," you say. I am absolutely of the contrary opinion, and consider it as a very absurd and improper expression; strictly and literally false, on supposition that he is but a mere man like ourselves.

Pray, Sir, who is that Jesus you talk about so much, as upon a *level* with yourself, and who notwithstanding is the only person of whom it was ever said, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily?" Some people would think, that here you pay a very uncommon compliment to yourself. From which, indeed, it may be inferred, that you suppose the whole fulness of the GODHEAD to dwell bodily in you? As we must be under a kind of necessity of coming to this conclusion upon the premises. "In CHRIST," says Paul, "dwelleth the whole fulness of the GODHEAD bodily." "Christ is in all respects but a man like ourselves," says Dr. Priestley. Then must it not be concluded, that the fulness of the Godhead does actually dwell bodily in us as well as in him? O James Nailor! I lament the hole which the burning iron made in thy tongue, for thy supposed blasphemy, seeing the most rational gentlemen of this enlightened age, talk in strains far superior to thine in point of mysticism, impenetrable to the eye of common sense.

Again I ask: is this Jesus, the only person in whom the wisdom and power of the *ONE true* GOD THE FATHER were manifested? Probably we shall find as great works performed in the name, and by the power of GOD, through the instrumentality

talities of others : works even of a more public nature, than any you allow to have been performed by JESUS of Nazareth. Did Jesus heal the lepers that came to him? So did *Elisba*. Did he raise the dead? So did that prophet. Did he shew the glory of God to his disciples on mount Tabor? So did the other to his servant on the hill of Samaria. Did he turn water into wine? *Moses* turned the rock into water. *Moses* and *Aaron* wrought all the wonders of God in Egypt—Divided the Red Sea—Made the serpent that healed the plague in Israel, &c. so that if the wisdom and power of God, manifesting themselves by a man as their instrument, entitle him to be thus represented, with much more propriety may it be said of *MOSES* or of *AARON*, than of *JESUS*, “ In him dwelleth all the fulness of the GODHEAD bodily ;” and yet no inspired penman ever ascribed this dignity to those Old Testament prophets.

It is certainly true, Sir, that in all your studies, the doctrine of consequences has had but a very slender share. Permit me a second time, to recommend it to your serious consideration.

Truly rational Christians, I mean those who worship the ONE GOD in TRINITY, as FATHER, SON, AND HOLY GHOST, avoid this difficulty, which absurd enthusiasts plunge themselves into. They clearly see, that how great soever were the works of Old Testament prophets, they were all performed in the name, and by the power of another ; but their Christ performed his miracles by his own power, and received the glory of them himself.

Moreover, is it not language dark and unintelligible, becoming none but a frantic enthusiast, to talk of Jesus being but a mere man, and yet the residence of the GODHEAD, or the DIVINE ESSENCE?

To have the whole fulness of the GODHEAD dwelling bodily in him, and yet have no personal claim to proper DEITY, or personal Union with that same GODHEAD that is said to dwell in him? Surely this manner of speaking, is far from that plain and simple stile which even the runner may read, and in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err?

It is every whit as difficult to conceive, how all the fulness of the GODHEAD should dwell bodily in a man, and yet that same ineffable DEITY, never to have been in any sense incarnated so as to dwell amongst us. Can any man therefore be blamed for giving the preference to *Mohammed's Koran*, a book that is clear from every sentence, that so much as tends to confound either CHRIST or *Mohammed* with pure and essential Deity? Although in so doing we are obliged to reject the Bible, as the most unintelligible and ambiguous of all writings whatever; as undoubtedly it is, if your scheme of doctrine be true.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER

L E T T E R X I X .

REVEREND SIR,

AS I could not possibly do myself the honour of sufficiently explaining our subject by the last post, I hope you will have the goodness to bear with me, if by this I send you a few additional remarks upon the absurdity of the penmen of the New Testament, and the visible embarrassment into which they have involved you, and the rest of your reverend brethren; the preachers of a Jesus Christ in all respects like yourselves, and not yet 1800 years existent.

It might have been expected, that a gentleman of your comprehensive genius, would have a little attended to the paradoxical paraphrase on John 1. which I transmitted to you in my Familiar Epistles, before you had again adduced it in favour of your scheme. The paraphrase was just, upon your application of the text; and your silence has been understood to result from a conscious incapacity to refute. But as that same passage has been pressed into the service of the Socinian enthusiasm, a second time, directly contrary to its genuine intention, I shall take the liberty to animadvert upon it, and on your application of it.

“ In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with GOD, and the WORD *was* GOD, &c. &c.” These words, you think, interpreted in the most literal manner, only imply, that the WORD, or CHRIST, had a being before the creation of the world, although he had, in reality, no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin: that he had the title of GOD, but by no means is to be considered as GOD, &c.*.” So then GOD called him what he really was not; and thus became accessary

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* Fam. Illust. 30, 31.

fary to our idolatry. Was this acting the part of a wise and faithful Creator ; or of a designing adversary ? This cannot be the God in whom I trust, and whom I adore.

You have allowed, that the above-mentioned passage, if literally interpreted, does imply, that CHRIST JESUS did exist before the creation of the world, and yet, in other productions of your prolific pen, you boldly assert, that he had no being prior to his birth of the Virgin. Even the subsequent paragraph, gives it as your opinion, that the apostles intention was to overthrow the doctrine of his pre-existence.

I shall, for the present, admit that to be the apostles intention, as it will suit my purpose, as well as if I was to suppose the contrary, and will serve to manifest the grand object I have in view, namely, the obscurity of the penmen of holy writ, on supposition, that your doctrine be the Gospel of Jesus. I shall therefore consider it in both views, as applicable either to Christ, or to the power and energy of God. “ In the beginning was the WORD ; the WORD whatever it was, was with God, and the WORD was God, and yet was not properly God. The same was in the beginning with God, and yet was not in the beginning, nor for a great while afterwards. All things were made by him, yet he himself was a made Being. Without him was not any thing made that is made : and yet every thing that is, was made, and the whole of creation finished 4000 years before he was born — In him was life, such life as we ourselves possess ; and the life was the light of men, by a virtuous conversation ; and although he was but a man like ourselves, his light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.—He was in the world, and the world was made

made by him, though he did not exist for 4000 years after the world *was made*. He was in the world, and the world knew him not, although they believed in him as a man like themselves. This same WORD was made flesh, and yet God was in no sense incarnated; he dwelt among us, and yet the man in whom he dwelt was no more *than a man like ourselves*. We beheld his glory, but it was not *his* glory, but that of the FATHER upon him; as the only begotten of the Father; and yet the Father hath many sons and daughters, begotten even as he was: full of grace and truth, and yet he is as much dependant on the FATHER as we are." Such, Sir, is the true sense of the passage, according to your plan of doctrine, if applied to JESUS CHRIST, and how full of confusion and absurdity it is, the above may serve as a specimen.

I shall now take it expressly in your sense, as by the WORD, the wisdom, power, and energy of God himself, being intended without any reference whatever had to JESUS CHRIST, as a divine person existing in DEITY, and then we shall have an opportunity of seeing how much more it looks like the ravings of *enthusiasm*, than the cool soberness of infinite wisdom.

"In the beginning was God, and God was God himself; the same was in the beginning with God—And God was made flesh, and dwelt among us; yet that flesh which God assumed, had no manner of personal Union with God. And we beheld the glory of God, as of the only begotten of the FATHER full of grace and truth."

Or you may take it thus, according to your amended explanation*; "In the beginning of

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creation,

* Fam. Illust. pag. 31.

creation, were *wisdom and power* ; *wisdom and power* were with God ; and *wisdom and power* were God. *Wisdom and power* were made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld their glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." So that at all events, we must have *one* that begets *another*, that is *begotten*, even upon your pretendedly rational plan.

But according to either of the above senses, I pray you, how much does the apostles stile rise above the level of nonsense ? Whether we understand by the WORD JESUS CHRIST, or the power, wisdom, and energy of God, it is obscure, ambiguous, and equivocal. It has a direct tendency to lead us to believe, that there was a Being called the WORD, long enough before the Virgin brought forth her Son ; one who was a distinct person from the FATHER, and who of himself had a proper claim to Deity. Consequently, if Jesus is in reality none other than a mere man like ourselves, and if the worshipping of him as God incarnate be idolatry, as you say it is, we have just cause to wish that John's gospel had never been written ; or that it had been burnt, rather than to have fallen into our hands. And you know that this passage, because of its great obscurity, has very much tended to mislead the idolatrous Trinitarians. They think it perfectly consistent with their own views of the Redeemer's person, and find no difficulty of accommodating it to their plan of doctrine ; whereas nothing less than all the wisdom of the crooked serpent, will be sufficient to accommodate it to your scheme of rational religion, otherwise irrational enthusiasm.

I assure you, Doctor, that in reading your Familiar Illustration, I very often think of the mountain in the fable, which, after such a noise and outcry

cry in labour, brought forth only a—mouse. I might give you numerous instances of it if I was in the humour; but shall as usual quote just as many as I think necessary. The first of which is that Rom. ix. 5. from pag. 32. of your Illustrations. “ Whose are the Father’s, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, CHRIST came, who is over all, God blessed forever. This may with equal propriety and truth be rendered, God, who is over all, be blessed forever. The former sentence ending with the word came.”

It might have been observed, however, that the word *came* is not in the text, but supplied by the translators with great propriety. You seem to confess, that our translation of the passage is just, supposing, indeed, that your own translation is only equally proper.

It was certainly very inaccurate, however if, according to you, the writer has left this passage in such a confused state, as to mislead the church for these seventeen hundred years. There have been men of learning in all the ages of the gospel dispensation, and yet they could never see into this mistaken notion, but have gone on worshipping the SON even as they worshipped the FATHER. So that, at all events, it serves to shew the obscurity of the apostolic writings, which is the point I contend for, in favour of *Al Koran* and the *Mohammedan religion*.

To be sure, the Trinitarians believing in CHRIST’S DIVINITY, find no manner of difficulty in this passage. They think that the apostle could not have delivered the mind of the Spirit, if he had written otherwise. They rejoice that they have a friend, who can, without robbery of the DEITY, claim an equality with the Father.

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They think that no greater happiness could accrue to the human-race, than to have one who is the friend of sinners, and at the same time, is God over all blessed forever more. But they frankly allow a right to depend upon their own righteousness, and to believe in a Saviour who is but a man like themselves, to gentlemen who are not sinners, but men of virtue; men of clear heads and sound hearts, who are capable of comprehending all that they will believe.

If Jesus Christ be not God over all, we have an undoubted right to censure the apostle for the obscurity of his stile; but if he should prove at last none other than God incarnate, I tremble for the fate of those enthusiasts who deny his proper DEITY. For if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the SON OF GOD, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant, by which the SON OF GOD was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? Seeing vengeance belongeth to him, and he will repay it.

Like unto this is that of 1 John v. 20, quoted by you*, and attempted to be explained away. But how ridiculously we shall see by and by. "And we know that the SON OF GOD is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his SON JESUS CHRIST. This is the true God and eternal life." The latter clause is undoubtedly explanatory of the title, him that is true, or the TRUE ONE, as you observe. But I must beg your patience, whilst I remark (1.) That not God, abstractly considered, is represented in
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* Fam. Illust. 32.

Scripture, as the life of his people, but Jesus Christ, as appears from Col. iii. 4. compared with John i. 4. Is it not therefore evident confusion to tell us in one place, "Christ is our life," and in another, to direct us to a different person, and say, "This is eternal life."

(2.) Who is said to be the true One, besides him that declares himself to be the true and faithful witness, the TRUTH itself? Is it not very strange to hear JOHN pointing to an absolute GOD, saying, "This is him that is true," and at the same time, to hear a man like ourselves reply, "I am the true and faithful witness: I am the truth itself." What can we think is either Christ's or the apostle's design? Which of them shall we believe, seeing both cannot be right?

(3.) Where are believers ever said to be in GOD, exclusive of a Mediator? But we are in him that is true, says the apostle. You say, him that is true, intends the *One* GOD the FATHER only. Ought we not to have some scriptural warrant for supposing ourselves to be in GOD the FATHER only? Would not this be something like ascribing personal Union with Deity to ourselves, whilst we deny it to his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON JESUS?

Nothing can, I think, be plainer, than, that the apostle intended us to consider JESUS CHRIST the Son of the Father, as *him that is true*, the Truth, or the TRUE ONE; and that of him he says, "This is the true GOD and ETERNAL LIFE, in the Union of the divine Essence." If he had any other intent, he might surely have hit upon a more happy and intelligible method of expressing himself, especially if inspired by the Holy Ghost, as is generally believed.

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That passage, John xx. 28*. " Thomas answered and said unto him, my LORD, and my God," must by no means be omitted, though I troubled you with my thoughts upon it, on a former occasion. Since then I have seen a very ingenious and uncommon explanation, written by one of your warm Kentish Votaries, which in substance is as follows, " Thomas meeting Jesus very unexpectedly, in a surprize, cried, my LORD, I did not expect to have seen you now—My God! is it you?" Thus this fanatical writer, who jumbles both houses of parliament, Doctor Dawson, and the shaver together, in the same incoherent performance, supposes, that Thomas the apostle, in order to testify his joy at seeing his master, took the Almighty's name in vain: and that Jesus, out of zeal for the FATHER's glory, suffers that prophaneness to go unreproved, and even encourages it.

Your explanation is much more genteel, but very little more to the purpose. Seeing, with all your address, you have not exculpated the apostle Thomas from the charge of idolatry, in worshipping Jesus the SON as his LORD and God. If another, essentially distinct from Christ, is intended by LORD and GOD in the text, why are we not told of it in the context? If we are not told of it, how can we be justly damned for not knowing it? How can we believe without a preacher?

I John v. 7. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these Three are One.* If you, Sir, or Sir Isaac Newton, really have seen John's original copy of this epistle, and carefully perused it, I must believe your assertion, " That this verse was not in it." But then it only serves to shew, that our Bible is, by the villainy of Trinitarians, got into such a corrupt

corrupt state, that it is high time to reject it, and embrace the Koran. I know divers others, have as clearly proved, that it was in the original copies, but what then; still I shall carry my point, seeing that not one sentence of the *Koran* has been ever questioned in point of originality. Indeed, much is due to the testimony of *Sir Isaac Newton*, provided he could read the book of Scripture with as much propriety as he could the book of Nature, but of this there are some doubters, who intend no disrespect to that astonishing genius. But the more his testimony avails, the sooner we shall get rid of the Bible, and have the Turkish *Koran* established as the pure word of the living God; reject Jesus, and embrace the prophet Mohammed as by far the most consistent.

That in 1 Tim. iii. 16. *God was manifest in the flesh*, you tell us, is also in a corrupt state*. But why all this labour, in turning over musty manuscripts, enough to give one the pestilence? Seeing you own, that even our translation is literally true? You say, that the Father, who was in him, did the works. This is what perplexes us, that the Father should live and act in the flesh of Jesus, as a soul lives and acts in the human body, and that after all, this flesh in which God was manifested, had no manner of personal Union with the DEITY, any more than we ourselves have, according to your assertion.

One quotation more from the apostolic writings, and then I shall conclude, for really I begin to tire of the subject, it is so full of confusion; therefore I beg to be excused from following you any farther upon it, than just to note the impropriety

* Illust. 38. Note, referring to the great pains Dr. Priestley tells us he has taken in examining many rare manuscript copies of the New Testament.

priety of that, Col. i. 15. on supposition, that Jesus Christ had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin.

“ Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

What could the apostle mean, by calling him the first-born of every creature, when some creatures were actually born more than four thousand years before him, according to your reckoning? To say, that all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, were created by him, when the truth is, he created none of them, but was even a created Being himself? That all things subsist by him, seeing he is but a mere man like ourselves? That he is before all things, notwithstanding the heavens and earth, angels, men, devils, and brutes and vegetables, were before him for many ages? I enter into no dispute with you, except, whether the apostle expresses himself in a manner in which people of common sense are likely to understand him, as intending a mere man, who had no being but a very few months or years before himself?

Yet I have heard this same Paul, by some of your people, highly applauded as a great man, a wonderful man, a prodigy of genius, &c. notwithstanding all his absurdities and clashings with your scheme of doctrine.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

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LETTER XX.

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING in my two last, given a small specimen of the obscurity and ambiguity of the apostolic writings, on supposition, that your doctrine is true; I shall in this venture to enquire, whether the conduct of the Jews, in putting Christ to death, ought to be justified or censured, supposing still that he was but a mere man like ourselves. Awful as it is, it may be asserted, that if he was only such, they had good reason for rejecting him as an impostor, and for treating him as a blasphemer: and this, if true, will make the idolatry of Trinitarians appear more gross and shocking. To ascertain this point, it will be necessary to enquire, whether they had a law against blasphemy, and whether they went according to that law in their proceedings against him.

The Jewish law inflicted death upon every blasphemer, as appears John xix. 7. Lev. xxiv. 16. And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, all the congregation shall certainly stone him*; and agreeably to this law, they took up stones to have stoned Jesus, when they apprehended him to be guilty of blasphemy, in making himself equal with God.

Seeing they had a law which doomed blasphemers to death, it cannot be doubted, that the Sanhedrim, with the consent of the Roman governor, had a power of judging and condemning blasphemers, according to that law: seeing the law had been given in vain, if the executive power had not been lodged somewhere; and where so likely as in the great council of the nation, at a time when there was no king in Israel.

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* Exod. xxii. Lev. xix.

The main difficulty is to determine, whether or not Jesus Christ was guilty of blasphemy ; and if but a man in all respects like ourselves, there is something so like it in his conduct and doctrine, that it is no wonder they understood him as blaspheming their God. Modern Jews may very well justify the conduct of their fathers, from the writings of his immediate disciples, whom they must necessarily consider as having been trained up in blasphemy, the blame of which they fail not to lay upon the master himself, as their teacher.

One disciple ascribes all the works of creation to him, whether of things visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, which is downright falsehood and blasphemy ; a robbery committed against GOD the FATHER, on supposition, that CHRIST himself is but a mere creature, who had no existence for thousands of years after creation was finished. Another disciple addressed him thus, " Lord, thou knowest all things." It is in vain to alledge, that *all things* here ought to be understood in a limited sense, and doth not imply an ascription of omniscience. If that is the sense, why are we not told so ? Why did not Jesus correct the apostles words, lest they should prove a stumbling to others ? Would not any body take *Peter* to intend nothing less than omniscience in its utmost latitude, seeing the knowledge of the heart is one thing evidently referred to. Thou knowest all things, thou knowest *that I love thee*. Which he could not do without searching the heart. But I have shewn, that he was so far from reproving Peter for this confession, that he even assumes this divine prerogative of searching the heart to himself.

No less than five times does Jesus in the revelation assume the name first and the last, expressive of the eternity of the MOST HIGH, which a mere man could

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not do without shocking blasphemy, seeing God will not give his glory to another. Office and station will never warrant his assumption of titles peculiar to supremacy, if he himself be in every sense subordinate, as you would have him supposed, and as the Jews considered him. This title, the FIRST and the LAST, being held sacred to the supreme BEING, throughout the whole of the Jewish dispensation, and now assumed by CHRIST, without any reference had to any greater and higher than himself, convinceth me, that if He is but a mere man like ourselves, he must have been the most notorious blasphemer that ever existed, and that the Jews are in the right, to deny him with a scornful rejection.

But although the manner in which the apostles speak of their Master, and what he says of himself in the book of Revelation, may fully justify the moderns in their rejecting of him, it cannot be urged as a plea for the ancient Jews, who crucified Christ before any of those books were written. It may therefore be proper to enquire into the grounds of their judgment, and the propriety of their conduct, from the ministry of Christ himself *.

To enter upon a formal process against JESUS OF NAZARETH, the idol of the Orthodox, to speak in the language of some rational divines; be it observed, that the

1. Charge against him is, " That he being not above thirty-three years of age, made the people believe that he existed before Abraham." The

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* I beg my reader never to lose sight of our leading supposition, " That Jesus Christ is no more than a man like ourselves; one who had no manner of existence prior to his being born of the Virgin;" for if you lose sight of this, you will take the writer to be either a Jew or a Mohammedan.

witness against him is, John viii. 56. "Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I AM." Your forced exposition of this passage, avails nothing in his defence. That he insinuated his own existence being prior to that of Abraham, is clear to a demonstration. And the Jews understood him according to the plain and obvious meaning of his words, therefore took up stones to have punished him for his arrogance in making himself older, and consequently greater than their *father Abraham*. If they mistook him, why did he not stay and clear up the mistake, instead of hiding himself, and getting privately away? This would have been charity becoming his pretensions to benevolence. But he never attempted in any future discourse to set them right in this matter, consequently we conclude his intent was, that people should believe in him as older than Abraham; this is the least of what is implied in his declaration, especially if compared with his behaviour immediately upon it.

2. Although he had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin, he endeavoured to make the people believe, that he had been in heaven, that he came down from heaven, and was made flesh; all of which tended to make him be thought somewhat, at least, more than a man like ourselves. For proof of this charge, see John iii. 13. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." That nothing short of a descending from heaven was intended, appears from v. 31. "He that cometh from above, is above

above all : he that cometh from heaven, is above all." Especially when compared with chap. xvi. 28. " I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ; again I leave the world, and go unto the Father." If words have any meaning at all, Jesus could design no less than to persuade the people, that heaven was his residence prior to his incarnation ; and in this light the apostles understood him, for they said, " now speakest thou plainly, and not in parables." And Christ himself suffers them to continue in that same belief, without attempting to convince them that they had mistaken his meaning. And such has been the effect of these and such like expressions of his, relative to his anti-incarnate state, that all who believe the New Testament to be the word of God, a few Arians and Socinians excepted, have uniformly believed in him as having existed from everlasting. But,

3. He gave his disciples room to consider him as omnipresent, and what is this but robbing the DEITY of one of his essential perfections. Mat. xviii. 20. For where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. It will require great address to twist this passage into any other form, than that of a declaration of personal omnipresence.

Believers may be met in his name, at one and the same time, in every parish church and dissenting meeting-house, in Britain and Ireland, or even in Europe, &c. and what less than a presence universally diffusive, can be adequate to this engagement. Did it not therefore tend to mislead his followers into a notion, that he could be present in many places at one and the same time. Or in other words, that he was possessor of a nature infinitely superior to mere humanity ? Were we to hear

the head of any party, encouraging his disciples to hope for his presence wherever they should assemble, would we not instantly conclude, either that he is a madman, or a designing villain? By parity of reason, the Jews had equal ground to be offended with JESUS CHRIST for such a manner of speaking, on supposition, that he hath no personal title to divine prerogatives.

Yet he is so far from relinquishing his pretensions, that even after they had punished his blasphemy with death, and he was risen from the dead, he repeats the promise with very considerable addition. "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world." So that there was promised not only the universal extent, but the perpetuity of his presence. It is not my province to enquire, what possible sense may be imposed upon the words; the business of the law, in cases of high treason, being only with the obvious meaning of what is spoken, and with the intent of the speaker. And surely it will require great art, to exculpate Jesus from the charge of making his disciples believe him to be every where present. Therefore, though shocking to speak it, the Jews did well in putting him to death for robbing the Deity. Yet the

4. Charge is still more gross, more highly aggravated than the former, for not content with distant allusions, he openly avows an equality with the Father, "I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE." This I noted before, as an instance of the ambiguity of his stile in preaching; now I considered it as a charge of blasphemy which the Jews had against him, and which undoubtedly was such in the highest degree. My Father is greater than all, he says, and then adds, "I and Father are One *". If he meant

* The word my is a supplement.

meant no more than, that he and the Father were One in will and design, might not the expletive easily have been added? How can he be justified in provoking the Jews, by using terms capable of being received in the most absolute sense, without attempting to explain his meaning? He even urges the propriety of his assertion, and for proof, adduces his unparalleled works. So that, consistently with sound reasoning, they could not have understood him otherwise than as making himself God. If it is replied in a way of excuse for him, "that in other places he expressly says, my Father is greater than I." The Jew may very justly retort upon us, "A sorry confession, indeed! for a man who is but of yesterday, to confess barely, than God is greater than him." Might you or I use even this expression, think you, consistently with a sense of the distance between the creature and the infinite Creator.

But Jesus seems even to have persuaded his disciples to believe in him, as identically the same with the Father, in respect to Essence. What lets can be understood by what he says to Philip? John xiv. 8, 9, 10. Lord shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us? Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long with you, *and yet hast thou not known me Philip.* He that hath seen ME, hath seen the FATHER: and how sayest thou, shew us the FATHER? Surely no man could understand him as designing otherwise, than to represent himself as essentially ONE with the FATHER; which, for a mere man to do, is the most shocking of all blasphemy; and he that would do so, was undoubtedly worthy of death, the law of the Lord having denounced the sentence.

But that is not all, for he even suffered himself to be worshipped, and never reproved any worshipper,

shipper, for shewing him too much respect, which may serve as a

5. Charge against him in the eye of a Jew. You, indeed, have laboured to exculpate him from this charge; and have reduced this worship to such a state, as to mean no more than a fine bow or a curtsie means with us.

But, Sir, it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Is worship here the same with what was paid to Jesus? If different, from whence do you gather your evidence? From the difference of expression, or otherwise? Not from the difference of expression. Therefore produce your warrant? Otherwise we shall still think, that suffering himself to be worshipped, was a crime worthy of death. Surely, no man can easily misunderstand Thomas the apostle in his address to Jesus, "MY LORD, and MY GOD;" which address was no way offensive, consequently Christ never reproves him, much less attempts to rectify his mistake.

How different was Mohammed's behaviour on a similar occasion, according to the testimony of *Al Beidawi*. Two Jewish Christians, named *Abu Râfé al Koradbi*, and *Al Seyid al Najrâni*, came to Mohammed, and offered to worship him, and acknowledge him for their Lord: to which that zealous prophet answered, "God forbid, that we should worship any besides God." So far, indeed, was he from receiving worship, that he is said to have confessed himself a sinner, and to have asked pardon an hundred times a day, if his commentators deserve any credit.

These charges being summoned up in one, after the manner of British judges in their charge to the jury, would not any twelve men have brought him in guilty; consequently the Jews and Pontius Pilate,

Pilate, did nothing but an act of justice in putting him to death, in that open ignominious manner recorded in the sacred Scriptures.

From all that has been said, it is clear, that the advantage is greatly on the side of the Mohammedan religion, and that its abettors have fewer difficulties to surmount, than those who glory in the name of rational Christians. But who may, at the same time, be treated as the most absurd of all enthusiasts; whilst the Trinitarians have the felicity of acting in a consistency with themselves as men of faith and religion, as well as with the dictates of revelation.

As it is a matter of no moment at all, whether Socinianism, or the religion of Mohammed prevail, neither of them having the least connection with real Christianity, which is the only religion taught in the WORD OF GOD; I shall sum up, in one point of view, the reasoning of this and the former letters.

I have shewn, and perhaps with as much force of argument, as you may heartily approve, that there is the most perfect agreement between the prophet Mohammed and yourself, respecting the doctrine of the ONE GOD, and that of the TRINITY, and it will be very difficult to determine, whether you, or that Arabian, expresses most abhorrence of the TRINITY. So that whether there be THREE that bear record in heaven or not, it is certain there are Two Men who bear the same testimony against that record.

Further, that there is the most perfect harmony between Mohammed and you, respecting the person of Jesus, as but a man like yourselves—also in regard to his mission, as a prophet or a teacher sent from God. So that how irrational soever you may deem the Orthodox, that prophet was at least as intelligent as yourself.

I have

I have shewn, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more consistent prophet than David, Isaiah, and the rest of the Old Testament prophets—That he was even a better preacher than Christ and all his apostles—That he was more tender of the Divine character, and more zealous for the glory of God, than all the prophets; than Christ and all his apostles, consequently, that he gave better proof of the divinity of his mission, than Jesus gave of his.—I have even shewn, that were your doctrine that of the Gospel, the world has received more extensive and more lasting advantages from Mohammed, than from all that Jesus Christ hath done and suffered. And to close the whole, I have demonstrated, that if the Lord Jesus be but a mere man like ourselves, he was an arrant impostor, a notorious blasphemer, and as such, most justly condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, and still rejected by their offspring.

These conclusions, Sir, dreadful as they are, naturally result from your scheme of doctrine. And is this what is obtruded upon us, under the character of rational religion? Boast no more, Sir, of your superior reason, till you have rejected a scheme laden with such absurdity. To become Mohammedans at once, would be acting with propriety, for then you would have a consistent system, as to the point before us; but your present motley, heterogeneous, perplexed system, has, it is to be hoped, a natural, a necessary tendency to dissolution. Remember, however, that these things are not to be trifled with. And permit me to subscribe myself,

REVEREND SIR,

Your humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

P. S.

P. S. I am not at all solicitous about the time or manner of your answer, but shall consider myself at liberty to resume my pen, when any fresh attack is made on the doctrine of Christ's proper Divinity, because if that falls, my hope must perish forever.

N. B. Those who have time and inclination to consider the other articles treated of in your appeal, will find every one of them equally big with absurdity.

Note, All the quotations from the KORAN, are from the octavo edit. printed in 1764.

The quotations from the APPEAL, from edit. 2, with improvements, 1771, without a bookseller's name.

F I N I S.

P. 2. I am not at all tedious about the time or manner of your answer, but shall consider myself at liberty to resume my pen, when any fresh track is made on the doctrine of Christ's proper Divinity, because if that fails, my hope must be still forever.

N. B. Those who have time and inclination to consider the other articles touched on in your appeal,

E R R A T A.

Page 36, line 4 from bottom, for (:) put (?) will find every thing.

39, l. 15, f. ascribes, r. ascribe

9, l. 1 and 2, del. as it follows immediately.

Note. All the quotations from the Koran, are from the octavo edit. printed in 1764. The quotations from the Appeal, from edit. 2, with improvements, 1771, without a bookeller's name.

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